

BELARUSIAN REVIEW



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EDITORIAL

Satellite TV for Belarus

Three years ago the Belarus Democracy Act was signed into law. It was reauthorized nearly unanimously at the end of last year. One of the major priorities of the Act was to provide external radio and television broadcasting into Belarus as an alternative to the regime's propaganda machine. The importance of free media in the democratic development of a country cannot be overestimated.

The main impediment to all plans for advancing democracy in Belarus is the almost total control by the current regime over in-country radio and television broadcasting. Since the printed media are also greatly restricted, the burden of providing objective alternative information to Belarus falls to media sources originating outside of the country. Otherwise, the majority of the population, lacking alternative sources, subconsciously accepts the regime's propaganda statements and news distortions at face value.

At this time, approximately a quarter of the population already has access to the Internet and is perhaps the best informed. A considerably smaller number listens to external Western short-wave broadcasts, over-the-border FM or AM broadcasts, or watches Euronews on television. Another quarter of the population is either committed to the official ideology, or affected by Soviet nostalgia. As unquestioning supporters of the regime, they are satisfied with in-country media, and are not interested in alternative information. Thus, it is the remaining middle half of the population that needs to be reached by enhanced external media in order to raise its awareness. The remainder of this article is focused on the information needs of this segment of Belarus' population.

The number of US and European Union funded radio broadcasts has grown in the recent years. Unfortunately, their audience percentages have not gone beyond low single digits. This is, in part, due to the change in listening habits of the people less willing to struggle with shortwave reception, or the limited cross-border reach of the relatively low power FM and AM stations. All of the outside broadcasters are strongly focused on the Internet, with some of them quite sophisticated, and undoubtedly not inexpensive to produce. And, since the Internet mainly reaches those who are technically savvy and also the best informed, the largest critical middle segment of the population remains poorly served.

The medium with the greatest popular impact is unquestionably television. And yet among the external information sources that medium currently fails to deliver. TV news coverage by Euronews is hampered by the fact that the accompanying audio is prepared and edited by the participating companies in the various countries. In Belarus, as a result, the audio produced in Russia, can be shamelessly biased, differing greatly from its English-language version. It is, however, practically the only Western TV program in Belarus, if one discounts the EU's misguided inclusion of RTVi in its European Radio for Belarus (ERB) project. RTVi naively placed its programs on the regime-controlled cable system with predictable results.

So, after three years since the passage of the Belarus Democracy Act, there is still no reliable or objective TV broadcasting into Belarus. A variety of explanations is being given, such as an insufficient number of satellite dishes, or unimpeded reporting by independent TV journalists. However, history tells that autocrats are hardly ever removed from power by safe and cautious methods. While the regime is trying to limit the use of satellite dishes, their number, nonetheless, continues to grow, and this course should be helped along. The support agencies, rather than searching for creative and possibly unorthodox solutions in a difficult situation, prefer to do, what is done under normal circumstances. But if the conditions in Belarus were normal and free, there would be little need for external broadcasting.

Recently a real possibility has emerged for effective TV broadcasting into Belarus. The Polish government, in cooperation with Polish Public Television, has been engaged for some time in preparing the TV Channel Belarus (previously referred to as TV BelSat). A multiyear agreement was signed between them to provide funding of over $6 million to finance this satellite TV station, due to start broadcasting in the fall of 2007. These funds are expected to cover almost all of the start-up and of the initial operating costs. The project needs some additional funding and political support from the United States. Such assistance will help firm up continuing public support in Poland, regardless of changes in government. It will also help its government to be better able to withstand the expected pressure and objections coming from the current Belarusian regime and its Russian allies.

This last initiative deserves unequivocal US support. The current American diplomatic practice calls for consulting with the European Union, and often deferring to it in matters dealing with Belarus. However, passing this urgently needed initiative to the cautious and unwieldy policies of the European Union, would, in our view, be decidedly less effective.

Walter Stankievich

FEATURES

Statement by Sean McCormack, Spokesman
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

September 11, 2007

Repression in Belarus

Belarusian authorities have stepped up intimidation of their citizens. Recently, opposition politician Andrey Klimov was convicted in a closed trial for publishing material on the Internet criticizing the Lukashenka regime. Police arrested people who were peacefully protesting the politically motivated trials of Young Front members, arrested the performers and audience of a play, and detained citizens attempting to take part in a commemoration of a medieval battle. Political parties planning to take part in elections next year have been threatened with deregistration.

The Lukashenka regime has expressed its desire for improved relations with the United States and other democratic nations. However, as long as the Belarusian authorities are not ready to abide by democratic norms, the United States will continue to maintain and strengthen sanctions on those responsible. The United States calls on the Belarusian authorities to release all prisoners held on politically motivated charges, and to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Belarus, including their rights to assemble peacefully and express themselves freely. Belarusians are paying a severe price for exercising the basic rights that are taken for granted in democratic societies.

From the Publisher

The regime in Belarus is desperately trying to establish new trade relations with other countries after Russia's apparent refusal to continue to subsidize it. Russia, after having for years defended on the world stage the regime's excesses, has decided that time has come to bring its 'ungrateful' ally economically to its knees, forcing Belarus to surrender its sovereignty. The European Union, as a major trading partner of Belarus, indicated its willingness to substantially expand its trade and support, once Belarus improves its human rights and democracy record, starting out with the release of all political prisoners. The Belarusian government, while proclaiming its good intentions, continues to do the opposite. Lately, the actively engaged young people became its major target. The repressions against them have greatly intensified. They are being summarily arrested and quickly sentenced to terms ranging from days and weeks in prison to years of forced labor, expulsions from universities or exorbitant fines. Their "crimes": taking part in unsanctioned meetings, belonging to unregistered organizations, supposedly using foul language in public or graffiti.

Our publication will continue to inform its readers and researchers about Belarus, counting on the help of our subscribers and supporters. The following have been especially generous this year: Anatol Lukjanczuk, Alice Kipel, George and Lorraine Kipel, Natalia Rusak, Matthew Smorstok, Alla Orsa Romano, Peter Kasaty, Nicholas Snieszko, Eugene Kazan, Karnella Najdziuk, Elisabeth Markowski, Maria Kiehn, Olga Wilson, Anatol Sankovitch.

DID YOU RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

Victims of Communism Memorial Panel

Remarks by Alan Charles Kors

I am surrounded by heroes and great scholars on this panel, and my only function is to state the obvious and to pay tribute to the victims. Above all else, there are the bodies, and one cannot discuss the past, present, or future while they lie there unacknowledged.

We are surrounded by slain innocents, and the scale is wholly new. This is <u>not</u> the thousands of the Inquisition; it is <u>not</u> the thousands of American lynching. This is <u>not</u> the six million dead from Nazi extermination. The best scholarship yields numbers that the mind must try to comprehend: <u>scores</u>, and <u>scores</u>, and <u>scores</u>, and <u>scores</u> of *millions* of bodies Shot; dead by deliberate exposure; starved; murdered in work camps and prisons meant to extract every last fiber of labor and then kill them. And widows and widowers and orphans.

No cause, ever, in the history of all mankind, has produced <u>more</u> slaughtered innocents and <u>more</u> orphans than socialism with power. It surpassed, exponentially, <u>all</u> other systems of production in turning out the dead. They are all around us. No one talks about them. No one honors them. No one does penance for them. No one has committed suicide for having been an apologist for those who did this to them. No one pays for them. No one is hunted down to account for them. It is exactly what Solzhenitsyn foresaw in *The Gulag*: "No, no one would have to *answer*. No one would be *looked into*."

The west accepts an epochal, monstrous, unforgivable double standard. We rehearse the crimes of Nazism almost daily, we teach them to our children as ultimate historical and moral lessons, and we bear witness to every victim. We are almost silent on the crimes of Communism. So the bodies lie among us, unnoticed, everywhere. We insisted upon "de-Nazification," and we excoriate those who tempered it in the name of new or emerging political realities. There never was or will be a similar "de-Communization," though the slaughter of innocents was exponentially greater, though those who signed the orders and ran the camps remain. In the case of Nazism, we hunt down ninety-year-old men, because "the bones cry out" for justice. In the case of Communism, we insisted on "no witch hunts," as the *New York Times* editorially demanded when Lithuania thought about accountability. Let the dead bury the dead, but the dead can bury no one.

Our artists rightly obsess on the lesser but still immeasurable holocaust, which lasted several years, and when we watch *Night and Fog, Shoah, Schindler's List*, and almost countless other films, we weep and we rededicate the humane parts of our souls. The greater Communist holocaust, which lasted decade after decade, the great charnel house of human history, educes no such art. Its one tender, modest film, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, from Solzhenitsyn's novel, is almost never replayed and cannot be found for purchase. That Communist holocaust, however, should have brought forth a flowering of western art, and witness, and sympathy. It should have called forth an Atlantic Ocean of tears. Instead, it has called forth a glacier of indifference. Kids who in the 1960s had portraits of Mao and Che on their college walls _ the moral equivalent of having hung portraits of Hitler, Goebbels, or Horst Wessel in one's dorm _ now teach our children about the moral superiority of their generation. Every historical textbook lingers on the crimes of Nazism, seeks their root causes, draws a lesson from them, and everyone knows the number "six million." By contrast, it is always "the mistakes" of Communism or of Stalinism (repeated, by mistake, again, and again, and again). Ask college freshmen how many died under Stalin's regime, and they will answer, even now, "thousands?... tens of thousands?" the equivalent of believing that Hitler killed "hundreds" of Jews. The denial of Hitler's dead or the minimization of the Jewish holocaust is, literally, a crime in most of Europe. The denial or minimization of Communist crimes is an intellectual and political art form. "Anti-fascist" is a term of honor. "Anti-Communist" is a term of ridicule and abuse. So the dead lie among us, ignored, and anyone with moral eyes must see them, spilling naked out of the television and movie screens, frozen in pain in our classrooms, and sprawled, unburied, across our politics and our culture.

Communism in power produced, everywhere, scarcity, murderous inefficiency, arbitrary inequality, cronyism, enslavement, concentration camps, torture, terror, the destruction of civil society, ecological disaster, brutal secret police, and systemic tyranny. Everywhere it ruled, there were, beyond our ability to comprehend their courage, those who endured solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, the sadistic infliction of pain, and slow or rapid death because they said "no," or because they criticized, or because they would not denounce their friends and colleagues, or simply because they annoyed, for whatever reason_even a joke_a Communist with power. To be moral beings, we must acknowledge and bear witness to these things. Until socialism is confronted with its lived Communist reality+the greatest atrocities of all recorded human life+we live in its age.

Our children do not know what happened, in any domain, under Communism. Those who depend on our media and our films do not know. The strength of even relatively free enterprise and even relatively limited government will ensure that our civilization lives on, prosperous and strong by any historical standard. It does so without self-belief, however, and without moral understanding of its place in the drama of human life, and without accounting for the scores of millions of dead and for the societies and beliefs that butchered them.

As for the mea culpas, we await them in vain. When Eisenhower heard that the German residents of a nearby city "didn't know" about a death camp whose stench should have reached their nostrils, he marched them, well-dressed, through the rotting corpses, and made them help dispose of their dead. We lack his authority. Milan Kundera stated the moral reality with clarity. What about those with good intentions? he asked in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*; who didn't know and acted in good faith? Kundera wrote of Oedipus: "When Oedipus realized that he himself was the cause of their suffering, he put out his own eyes and wandered blind away from Thebes+.Unable to stand the sight of the misfortunes he had wrought by 'not knowing,' he put out his eyes and wandered blind away from Thebes."

Indeed, let the Communists and their apologists acknowledge the dead, bury the dead, and atone for the dead. Otherwise, let them be forgiven only when they have put out their eyes and wandered blind away from Thebes. Let western intellectuals learn the words of "Requiem," written during the Stalinist terror by Anna Akhmatova, the greatest Russian poet of the twentieth century: "I will remember them always and everywhere, I will never forget them no matter what comes." The bodies demand accounting, apology, and repentance. Without such things, the age of Communism lives. Thank you.

Alan Charles Kors is a Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania. His remarks at the Heritage Foundation on June 12, 2007, were taken by the author from his longer article "Can There Be An 'After Socialism'?" published in 2003 by the Social Philosophy and Policy Foundation.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes."

MAHATMA GANDHI

"Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it."

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

A Letter to the European Union

By Dr. Aliaksandr Milinkevich

DEAR EUROPEAN UNION, DEAR EU MEMBER STATES, DEAR EU CITIZENS

The European Union is of vital value for Belarus and its future as a European democracy. Belarus is a new nation-state in the center-east Europe. Over centuries, many Belarusians have been contributing to the development of European ideas, science and culture. Unfortunately, during the last two centuries Belarus' relations and contacts with European countries were not developing at full scale. The regime that exists in Belarus at the moment has also been trying to build fence between Belarusians and Europe.



Aliaksandr Milinkevich

Lukashenka's model of development for Belarus obviously leads to a deadlock. This path lacks any long-term vision for the development of our country. At the same time, there is an increasing number of Belarusians, especially young people, who want changes and stand for independence, democracy and European choice for Belarus. For all of us, the European choice is not only the choice of better life conditions or modern technologies. It is our civilizational choice. Our country belongs to Europe, we want it to share fully European values of democracy and civil society.

Today we can see that despite the regime's self-isolation from Europe, Belarus is becoming more and more exposed to it. The EU as a whole and its member-states have an increasing influence and leverage on Belarus. The EU has declared that it keeps the door open for a dialogue with the regime. The dialogue is to be conditional. The preconditions for starting the dialogue are very well known; they are plainly explained in an EU message to the Belarusian people "What the European Union could bring to Belarus." This dialogue has to be transparent and understandable to the Belarusian people, and it should involve the Belarusian democratic forces as a third partner.

Unfortunately, latest facts of political repressions, especially in relation to young democratic activists, show us that Lukashenka's regime is not willing to take the hand extended by the EU and start a democratization process in Belarus. The EU should judge the validity of changes in Belarus or in Lukashenka's behavior based on deeds, not promises.

The Belarusian democratic forces state that any trade-off of Belarus' independence is unacceptable since we know that in free and democratic conditions the people of Belarus will never give up the independence of Belarus. Some of our European partners express rather founded concerns that a consistent and uncompromising pressure from on the regime by the EU will push it even more towards Russia, thus putting in danger the very independence of Belarus. In order to substantially decrease such risk the EU democracy-promotion policy is to come with a clear message that the EU shall not recognize any moves or decisions that would endanger the international legal personality of Belarus as an independent nation. Decisions made by undemocratic governments a priori cannot be seen as a free expression of popular will and therefore cannot be considered legitimate and legal. We expect the EU to publicly state this position and to unequivocally express it in formal and informal contacts with the representatives of Russia's government.

At the same time, we hope that the talk about the dialogue will not prevent the EU from playing a prominent positive role in helping to bring Belarus back to the European family of free nations. We want the EU to develop a better understanding of what Belarus is, in what directions it is moving and how Europe can influence the dynamics taking place within the Belarusian society and economy. We hope that our European neighbors are increasingly realizing that Belarus is not Lukashenka, that there are Belarusian reform-oriented forces who stand for free elections, democracy, independence and European choice for Belarus.

The EU is to realize that it has an interest in supporting its friends within Belarus by offering them tangible benefits from cooperation and bypassing the regime's obstacles. For that end, the various Belarusian domestic pro-European interest groups and political structures are to be engaged in a dense network of contacts and common programs. There is a huge potential for cooperation between Belarusian and European civil societies. The Belarusian society needs more knowledge about democracy, human rights and market economy. European partners can promote cooperation in the fields of educational and youth exchanges, environmental and historical heritage protection.

We expect the EU to be more active and consistent in promotion of democracy in Belarus and to act urgently to implement a more effective policy. Nowadays, when hundreds of regime's opponents are excluded from studies and laid off from work, we expect the EU to develop further study opportunities and create employment opportunities by establishing quotas of working permits for Belarusians in the EU. Removing artificial obstacles on the way of our countries' citizens should be our aim. The EU member-states' visa policy towards should be reconsidered aiming to soften the visa regime and to reduce or even abolish, but not at all increasing, the visa costs for Belarusians. A concrete offer of European alternative for the Belarusian people will vitally help the Belarusian democratic forces to vanquish the apathy and uncertainty upheld among our fellow citizens by the regime. We all know that the whole region will benefit from an open and democratic European Belarus, starting with the Belarusian citizens, the EU as a whole and all Belarus' immediate neighbors, including the Russian Federation.

Sincerely yours,
Aliaksandr Milinkevich

***Dr. Aliaksandr Milinkevich, leader of the Movement for Freedom in Belarus**, was a key figure in street protests against dictatorship in Belarus in 2006. He was imprisoned for obvious political reasons between April 29 and May 12, 2006.*
He stood as the candidate of united democratic forces in presidential elections in Belarus, and was the initiator of creating the Committee for Defense the Repressed in Belarus. Furthermore, he is the chairman of the All-Belarusian Association for the development of civil society (Belarusian Association of Resource Centers, established between 1997 and 2005) and is a winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for "Freedom of Thought", awarded to him in 2006.

Belarus' Forum

Illegal Independence Day

It seemed like the beginning of a normal July weekend in Miensk — a typical Friday afternoon, with lots of tipsy studs on the prowl, bottles in hand, checking out girls barely covered in skimpy skirts and tops. I saw lots of "Belarusian couples," young women with much older men, speaking in broken English (the summer is bride-hunting season for foreign grooms-to-be). Life seemed quite normal — the temperature was not so hot, both in an environmental and political sense. Even the opposition needs a quiet vacation.

But maybe the regime knows something that we don't. Something was different this July. Either our opposition has become more active, or the regime is more paranoid. I think it's a little bit of both. Clearly our young people aren't afraid of threats, court cases or prison terms. They continue to organize numerous, small, but brave, protests and civic actions. Their determined activity makes it clear that they are tired of waiting for our "adult" opposition" to unite and act. Unlike our party leaders, they actually are trying to do something positive, setting a proud example for those who are apathetic, scared or would rather spend their time in Vilnius, discussing amongst themselves how to topple the regime.

Agents Smiths. The result is an even more absurd reality in today's Belarus. For a few of us, July 27th is Independence Day. 17 years ago, before the Lukashenka Era, our parliament passed an act recognizing the sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus. Today, our president claims to be defending that sovereignty. But last week only, some 60 people, mostly youth activists, were arrested and detained to prevent them from participation in any Independence Day celebrations. A civic activist was fined $150 for wearing a "For Freedom" movement tee shirt, while the movement itself was denied legal registration, even though it, like our president, pledges to defend Belarus' sovereignty. One leader of the Young Front, a youth group whose members have been repressed more frequently than all of those from the opposition political parties combined, was arrested, spent the night in prison, and was released because the "witness" from the police, who detained him the day before (for swearing on the street), did not show up in court. A few hours later, however, after the young activist came home, the police showed up to arrest him again, because the "witness" had changed his mind and appeared in court.

On Independence Day, only about 40 people showed up (or managed to get through the hundreds of police cordons) to celebrate the event. Most of them were young people; few political party leaders were seen. The opposition did a poor job of advertising or coordinating any activities. The activists met at Kupala Square, named after one of Belarus' greatest writers. This year, Independence Day coincided with the 125th anniversary of his birth. Instead of lots of red and white banners, flags and tee shirts, there was a blanket of black uniforms of the security forces, who outnumbered the opposition in droves. Clearly the regime is on edge, afraid of any protest, no matter how small, and determined to quash any peaceful protest, especially those organized by youth.

The uniformed police and plain clothes "Agent Smiths" checked the bags and documents of anyone wearing "For Freedom" pins, even if they were only passing through Miensk's downtown. During the Friday rush hour, public transport, including the subway, didn't stop at Miensk's main boulevard. People left their offices early in order not to be caught up in the round-ups designed so the police could fulfill their quotas of arrested opposition activists. Catholics couldn't make it to evening services at the Red Church (the cathedral near Independence Square). Democratic activists were detained in the suburbs, hours before the celebration. Black was everywhere, night overwhelmed our Independence Day.

Sadly, the majority of the population had no idea what all this craziness was about. Only two people out of several dozen, surveyed on Miensk's streets by Radio Free Europe, knew why July 27th was important in Belarus' history. And this is despite the fact that, until 1996, July 27th was the main state holiday of a newly independent Belarus. Sad, but not completely unexpected. Until the dispute with Putin, the regime had done everything it could to "forget" that ours was a sovereign state. Lukashenka spent most of his time in power promoting union with Russia, the re-creation of the Soviet Union, and something called the Commonwealth of Independent States—anything but an independent Belarus. Now that it is avoiding Russia's "friendly embrace," it still can't recognize this day as one worth celebrating with us. Instead, it was just another day of repression. We will be free only when independence is felt by everyone, an independence free of stereotypes, prejudice, passivity and fear. That will be a day truly worth celebrating.

One leader of the Young Front, a youth group whose members have been repressed more frequently than all of those from the opposition political parties combined, was arrested, spent the night in prison, and was released because the "witness" from the police, who detained him the day before (for swearing on the street), did not show up in court. A few hours later, however, after the young activist came home, the police showed up to arrest him again, because the "witness" had changed his mind and appeared in court.

That's horrible.. I can't help but recall Kundera's heroes

Source: TOL Blogs, July 30th, 2007, by *Intervenous*

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

MARGARET MEAD

History in Danger

By Ales Chaichyts

We are witnessing the greatest act of vandalism in the history of independent Belarus. The authorities of Belarusian city Hrodna (Refer to the **Editor's Note** at the end of the article) plan to demolish 40% of the city's historical buildings that comprise its Old Town.

Hrodna is the last large city in Belarus where historical architecture was preserved as a whole. Historical centers in other Belarusian cities were largely vandalized or completely destroyed by the Russian czarist regime, communists or during World War II battles. Even the oldest residents do not remember how other old Belarusian cities once looked. Brest, Minsk, Mahiliou suffered drastic alteration of their architecture, becoming typical Soviet cities, where Belarusian history is hidden behind Soviet-style concrete monoliths. Hrodna was saved only by a miracle.

The tragedy of the situation in Hrodna is that this time, it is not an invader or outsider who does not care about Belarus. Today's vandal is the Belarusian state whose duty is to preserve national architectural monuments, of which only few remain. Corrupt bureaucrats are willing to break the law and numb the people's conscience in order to make easy money from high real estate prices in old, historical sections of Belarusian cities. The same situation has already occurred in Vitsiebsk where blasphemous officials ordered building a sewer system on the foundations of ancient churches. Minsk's heritage is also in danger — city authorities are haggling with Arab investors about the construction of a hotel complex with tennis courts, saunas, and other entertainment on the foundation of the medieval monastery.

In the situation when the infringer is the state itself, civil society must step forward to defend our heritage — all of us must act. The Hrodna acropolis meets UNESCO requirements for admission to the list of world cultural heritage. If we allow bureaucrats to destroy Hrodna's historical center, we will also become passive contributors to vandalism against not only our children but the entire world culture.

In European terms, Belarus has large tracts of developable territory. We have enough space to build offices and hotels without demolishing precious architectural monuments, don't we? Architecture can serve to promote Hrodna as a major tourist destination like Vilnius and Krakow, providing a proud tourist industry center for Belarus. However, no tourist will come to visit a vandalized church, soulless offices or tasteless tiles in place of destroyed ancient masonry.

Save our history!

For Belarus! For our Hrodna!
Source: Blog POZIRK, August 2007

Editor's Note: The author of this article uses the current official name of the city - HRODNA. It must be noted that in Belarusian its proper (and historical) name is **HORADNIA**.

Horadnia's History

Medieval History

The modern city of Horadnia originated as a fortified trading post in the western part of Black Rus, a region neighboring the Baltic tribe Yatwingians (*Yacviahi* in Belarusian) and later the Grand Duchy of Litva (Lithuania). Its name derives from the Old Belarusian word *horodit'* (i.e. to enclose, to fence).

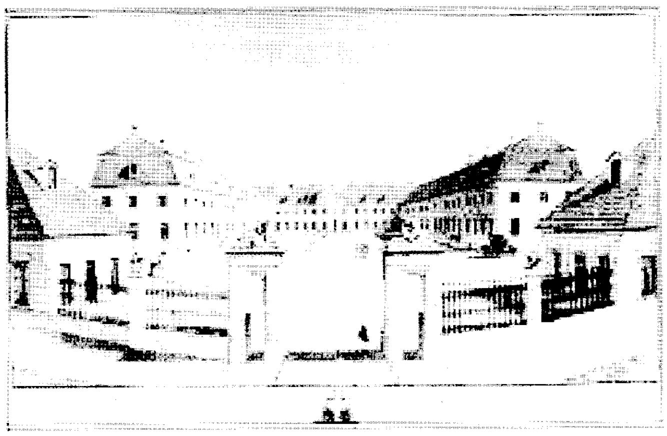
Mentioned for the first time in 1227 in the Primary Chronicle as *Horoden'*, and probably originating as early as the late 10th century, it became the capital of a separate principality. It was often invaded by the Teutonic Knights. In the 1250s it became a part of the Grand Duchy of Litva. The famous Grand Duke Vitaut was the prince of Horadnia from 1376 to 1392, and he remained there during his preparations for the battle of Grunwald (1410).

Polish-Lithuanian (Litvan) Commonwealth

To aid the development of trade and commerce, the grand dukes allowed the creation of a Jewish commune in 1389, one of the first Jewish centers in the Grand Duchy. In 1441 the city received its charter , based on the Magdeburg Law.

An important center of trade, commerce and culture, Horadnia remained one of the sites where the *Soims* (parliament meetings) of the Commonwealth were held. The last *Soim* was held in Horadnia in 1793. Its Old and New Castles were often visited by Commonwealth monarchs. It was in the New Castle that the last Polish King and Litvanian Grand Duke Stanislaw August Poniatowski abdicated his throne on November 25 of 1795.

After its incorporation in the Russian Empire in 1795, the city continued to serve as the seat of a separate governorship (*gubernia*). Industrial activities, initiated in the late 18th century by Antoni Tyzenhauz, continued to develop.



The New Castle in Horadnia used to be a summer residence of the Commonwealth monarchs.

ECONOMY

Gas Row Raises Concerns For Economy's Health

Source: (RFE/RL), August 2, 2007

Russian gas monopoly Gazprom announced on August 1 that it will cut gas supplies to Belarus by 45 percent as of August 3 because of an unpaid gas bill of $456 million for deliveries in the first half of 2007. The move could be problematic for the government of hard-line President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

The country's economic stability -- or what Belarusian officials call an "economic miracle" -- has been largely due to cheap energy and favorable loans from Russia. RFE/RL correspondent Luke Allnutt asked Vitali Silitski, the director of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, about how the move could affect the Belarusian economy.

RFE/RL: Is Belarus on the verge of economic collapse? Energy consumption [compared] to GDP in Belarus is perhaps double what it is in Central Europe.

Vitali Silitski: Not at all. The problem is rather technical and, as a matter of fact, if they wanted to pay that, they would have. It's more the political and economic maneuvering by the Belarusian side that led to this situation. Talking about the issue in question, it's about $500 million, and if they had wanted to pay it they could pay it with the money they received from the sale of [gas-pipeline operator] Beltranshaz.

RFE/RL: So why don't they pay?

Silitski: That's a very good question. There are several versions. One of them is that they are trying to use the debt as a pretext to get a new Russian loan and that they're sort of stocking up money in advance. The issue is not the economic difficulties right now, but the economic difficulties they would face in the future when the prices grow. So I think they wanted to receive a Russian loan in advance.

RFE/RL: So gas prices in 2011 will rise to reach EU levels. You mentioned that in the short-term Belarus won't face any immediate economic difficulties, but in the medium and long terms could they face problems?

Silitski: If they're not capable of adjusting to these prices then, of course, they will. So it's no question.

RFE/RL: What do you think the Belarusian economy needs to do to adjust?

Silitski: Well, they have to start reforms that have been delayed for a decade and a half, starting with the energy sector and going down to privatization and restructuring of the economy. One of the reasons why this energy conflict is so prominent is that [Belarus] has just got used to their low energy prices for so long and the state-owned enterprises are just not that efficient.

Probably energy consumption [compared] to GDP in Belarus is perhaps double what it is in Central Europe. They are trying to avoid privatization, but then it cost them. Right now their short-term strategy is to replace any serious restructuring of the economy by just borrowing.

RFE/RL: And why are the Belarusian authorities trying to avoid restructuring of the economy?

Silitski: Just because it is an issue of political control.

RFE/RL: Meaning if, for instance, there was a factory that employs 30,000 people...

Silitski: Absolutely, if they started employing 5,000 people, what do you do with 25,000 people? And if you give away property into private hands, how do you control it and another bunch of issues.

RFE/RL: There have been hints from Belarusian officials that they do want to privatize, perhaps not big enterprises, but at least small- and medium-sized enterprises. Are there are any realistic signs that Belarus could begin a privatization program?

Silitski: This government will not start any privatization until all other options have been used, and right now they're running out of options. Right now they're trying to replace privatization with state-run modernization of state-owned enterprises again by using foreign borrowing and just a few weeks ago they announced a major modernization of the cement industry and again they refused to privatize. [Instead] they want to borrow some half a billion dollars on the international markets to invest in these enterprises. So that's their strategy. They will pursue it until a) the external resources, the loans, are unavailable; and b) they encounter the situation where they have to privatize. But it will be a very difficult decision for them for the reasons I just mentioned.

RFE/RL: And turning to Russia's relations with Belarus. Has Putin now had enough of Lukashenka?

Silitski: I don't know whether it is really a political issue right now. It's not clear for me. They just failed to pay their debts and the one thing Russia wants from Belarus right now is money. Such situations were frequent a decade ago, but at that time it was pretty easy for Lukashenka to get some postponement or be forgiven the debt, but [this situation] is no longer. So Russia is definitely getting more tough on Lukashenka.

RFE/RL: And apart from Russia, is there anywhere else Belarus could get the money from?

Silitski: Oh, very easily. It's not an issue of politics all the time. Private borrowing is private borrowing. It is given by private commercial banks. Unlike Russia, Belarus has a very good record dealing with Western partners in terms of borrowing and returning debts. And interest rates that Belarus will be charged will be higher than in [Western] Europe, so it's pretty profitable to loan money to Belarus. Also there are these fraternal states like Venezuela, etc. But it's not that important, it's not that big money compared to Europe and Russia.

RFE/RL: Some analysts have said that in the long term this could be good for Belarus as it could be forced into market liberalization and that could mean, in turn, more political freedom. Do you think that's an accurate analysis?

Silitski: Well, in the long term, without doubt. Yes, I sort of think it will be good for Belarus. But the relationship between economy and politics is not linear. Even if the [Belarusian authorities] go for some economic reform, they

will do it only to the extent where they will be able to keep political control. So even if you have some economic liberalization, political liberalization [can lag behind] for quite some time. It's simply not that easy.

Gazprom's Challenge to Belarus: Internal Reactions

By David Marples

On August 2, Belarusian president Alyaksandr Lukashenka declared that his country would dip into its reserves to pay its existing debt to Gazprom of $456 million (*Itar-Tass*, August 2). His decision brought a temporary halt to the current crisis raised by Belarus's failure to meet its July 23 payment and Gazprom's response that it would reduce supplies of gas by 45% starting August 3. Earlier Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorsky had failed in an attempt to obtain up to $2 billion in credit in talks with his Russian counterpart, Mikhail Fradkov (*Kommersant*, August 2).

Belarus agreed at the beginning of the year to raise its payment for Russian gas from $47 per thousand cubic meters to $100, with prices rising to world levels by 2011 (www.gazprom.com, January 1). In turn Russia paid $625 million for its initial 12.5% share of Beltransgaz, of which it will have 50% ownership by 2010. In theory therefore, Belarus had funds in place to meet its current debt but used them for other purposes. The new dispute has raised questions in Belarus both regarding the political and economic intentions of the Russians toward their country, and the likely result of Belarus's rising debts on social programs and the popularity of the president.

In his July 10 interview with the French newspaper Le Monde, Lukashenka claimed that both Belarusians and Ukrainians had taken part in the creation of Gazprom and construction of gas lines in Siberia in the Soviet period and merited some benefits from the company's wealth and expansion. Russia thus took an unprecedented step when it raised prices. He also described Russian plans to build an alternative Northern European pipeline as "a stupid project." He added, nevertheless, that Russian President Vladimir Putin was essentially a "Soviet man" and a friend, even though at times he chose to change his colors (*SB-Belarus' Segodnya*, August 2). However, on a separate occasion, Lukashenka declared that Russia's goal was to privatize all of Belarus and — a point he has made frequently — that the Putin government had reneged on earlier agreements with former president Boris Yeltsin on the nature of the Union State (*Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, August 2).

Responding to Lukashenka's comment about the wish to privatize all of Belarus, Syarhey Musienka, head of the "EKOOM" analytical center, remarked that 10-15 new Russian oligarchs would emerge from the privatization of large Belarusian firms, such as oil refineries and metallurgical and chemical factories (*Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, August 2). In short, privatization would be tantamount to Russian economic control over Belarus by private companies and the state-controlled Gazprom.

Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Semashka reportedly promised privatization of some large petrochemical enterprises in March 2007, which aroused the interest of Russian companies such as Lukoil, Gazprom, and Uralkaly (though they were concerned by the high prices requested) (*Kommersant*, July 2). Yet no changes have occurred. Rather, Lukashenka has clung to state control over large companies and found himself in the unusual dilemma of being short of funds to raise pensions as promised, and canceling transportation benefits for pensioners and students last May. Yaraslau Romanchuk of the United Civic Party commented on the paradox that the government was trumpeting its economic successes while being unable to meet a bill of under $500 million to pay for gas (*www.charter97.org*, July 31).

Political analyst Andrei Suzdaltsev believes that the crisis between Russia and Belarus will go through three stages: the first focusing on energy issues, the second on financial questions, and lastly political concerns (*www.charter97.org*, August 1), implying heightened Russian influence over the internal situation in Belarus. A report from German journalist Barbara Oertel, cited on the Charter-97 webpage, also stated that the Russians have "written off" Lukashenka and will decide his successor in Moscow (*www.charter97.org*, August 2).

For the present, the Lukashenka regime stutters on, looking increasingly precarious. As in the past the president has explained his predicament through the incompetence of his officials and in late July he dismissed the heads of Beltransgaz (Dzmitry Kazakou), Belnefttekhima (Belarusian Petro-chemicals, Alyaksandr Barouski), and BNK (the Belarusian oil company, Mikalay Vasilevich). They were replaced respectively by Uladzimir Mayorau, Valery Kazakevich, and Uladzimir Zubkou. In the case of Barouski, the goal was ostensibly to remove a man convicted of embezzlement. Two of the replacements are former government functionaries: Kazakevich headed the apparatus of the Council of Ministers and Mayorau was a deputy chairman of the Homel' regional government. Thus there is some credibility to the president's stated wish to install order and bring matters under his "personal control" (*Belarusy i Rynok*, Jul 30-August 6). Such changes also suggest that the president is determined to resist calls to privatize companies like Belnefttekhima and BNK.

The hard-line ruler may soon be obliged to relinquish control over some state enterprises and introduce market reforms. That step may lead to some liberalization, but it could also threaten the sovereignty of Belarus if the new owners are exclusively Russian-based. In turn, the benefits that have accrued from state ownership and cheap energy resources in Belarus are beginning to dissipate. Pensioners and students are the first to feel the effects, but others will follow. The regime responds to its predicament by seeking loans (especially from Russia) but it has little with which to bargain. Putin, the president's acclaimed friend, is not really a friend at all. But Lukashenka has nowhere else to turn.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, August 3, 2007

No More EU Trade Preferences For Belarus

By Luke Allnutt

A recent EU decision to end trade preferences for Belarus is about to go into effect.

The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) benefits will be suspended on June 21 as punishment for the Belarusian government's failure to implement the International Labor Organization's (ILO) recommendations regarding the country's trade unions.

The Geneva-based ILO has said that in Belarus union bank accounts have been frozen, union activists fired from their jobs, and there have been limitations on the right to strike.

Those charges led the European Union to announce on June 15 that Belarus would be removed from the GSP. The "preferences" are intended to benefit developing countries by lowering tariffs.

'Not Isolation'

Stephen Adams, a press officer for the EU's Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson, says that the EU's intention isn't to isolate Belarus.

"The intention is simply to apply a little bit of pressure in a way that encourages Belarus to ensure that workers in that country are granted the labor rights, the rights to freedom of association that they're entitled to under Belarus's own ILO commitments," Adams says.

But the Belarusian Foreign Ministry has said the measures will hurt ordinary Belarusians.

The government-funded Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) said in a May statement that the European Union's "sanctions" would "result, first of all, in workers' decrease in incomes, reduction of social guarantees, [and] loss of jobs."

'Double Standards'

Mikalay Belanouski, the head of the Minsk branch of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, accuses the EU of double standards.

"There are many countries in the world where the rights of workers and trade unions are simply nonexistent. But nobody takes such measures against them today," Belanouski says.

The EU has placed travel bans on senior officials, like President Lukashenka (RFE/RL) The EU says it has given Belarus plenty of chances.

Press officer Adams says that the EU has had 4 1/2 years of dialogue with Belarus on this issue and in December 2006 gave Belarus a six-month grace period -- the last chance to make good on its ILO commitments.

In the past, the EU has accused the Belarusian regime of rigging elections and clamping down on the political opposition. It has hit Minsk with financial sanctions and placed a travel ban on senior Belarusian officials.

EU-Belarus Business

Belarus does a significant amount of business with the European Union, its second-largest trade partner. According to EU figures for 2004, Belarus did $7 billion worth of export trade with the EU -- out of a total of $16.7 billion.

Only 12 percent of Belarus's products exported to the EU benefit from the preferential tariffs.

Among the exports to be affected would be farm machinery and chemicals, but not oil and gas from Russia that travels to Europe via Belarus.

The head of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Labor Unions, Alyaksandr Yarashuk, told AP that the country could lose between $270 million to $540 million a year.

But an economist at the Vilnius-based independent Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, Kiryl Haiduk, says that figure is likely to be much smaller.

In fact, he says, the impact on the Belarusian economy will be "very small."

"The most pessimistic estimate of losses is from $52.2-$66.6 million per year and the optimistic, and I would say more realistic, estimates range from $23-$36 million per year," Haiduk says.

Haiduk says that, even with the withdrawal of preferences, Belarus's exports to the EU are concentrated in sectors that have relatively low tariffs anyway.

Whatever the impact, the EU has made clear that it is prepared to reinstate the preferences in the future.

"If the ILO was to rule, to demonstrate to the European Union that Belarus had brought its practice in line with its ILO obligations, [then] the trade preferences could be reinstated very very quickly," Adams says.

(RFE/RL's Belarus Service contributed to this report)

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, June 20, 2007

QUOTES of QUARTER

"There is no terrorism in Belarus. All these games about explosives in Vitsebsk, Mahilou, serve only political purposes - to intimidate - not so much the people, but certain politicians. As well as to get money for these games, to get better salaries."

VALER KOSTKA, a former KGB officer.

"A huge repression mechanism has been created; it must produce some results. Someone must be punished. At the same time the center of gravity of repressive decisions keeps moving downward, and the center of reversing them has already risen - all the way up to Lukashenka's level."

MIKALAY STATKEVICH, a politician and former political prisoner.

Merchants of Freedom

Source: Transitions-On-Line, 13 July 2007

Street vendors may succeed where international pressure has failed in Belarus, but they need support.

Belarusians have endured a decade of sham elections, a bogus plebiscite extending their president's power, and a command economy so corrupt that the World Bank ranks Belarus among the worst places to do business.

So it comes as no surprise that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's "Kyiv Declaration" condemns the continued repression of academic freedom, independent journalism, and opposition politics in Belarus. Issued this week, it is the latest in a heap of statements generated over the years by international organizations and rights advocates to exert pressure on Alyaksandr Lukashenka, an absolutist president who has overstayed his welcome 13 years after winning power.

The OSCE, European Union, and United States would save words and possibly get better results through more vigorous support of grass-roots movements in Belarus. Consider, for a start, the call for change that is coming from a few thousand unconventional revolutionaries: the small-time capitalists who scratch together a living in the shops and commercial markets of Minsk, Grodno, and other cities.

Anatoli Shumchanka once sold blue jeans on the streets of Minsk. Today, the businessman-turned-organizer still works the streets, selling the hope of political and economic freedom. The Perspektyva organization that he runs represents the women and men who sell inexpensive clothing and cheap household goods to Belarusians – or at least those who are not privileged to belong to the ruling echelon.

The merchants' movement symbolizes the desire for change in Belarus, a nation of 10 million that is isolated from nearly all of its European neighbors except Russia.

FREEDOM TO EARN A LIVING

Perspektyva was founded in 2003 to represent small merchants who are anxious for market and political liberalization. Merchants are dependent on imports from Russia, and Shumchanka says corruption and a state-dominated economy put a chokehold on small entrepreneurs' ability to survive. Like the Polish shipyard workers who started the Solidarity movement, the Belarusians want fair play and economic security. "For me, a businessman is a free person who is free to earn money and support anyone he wants to politically," Shumchanka told TOL.

Yet Perspektvya and its members have faced a struggle for survival. Shumchanka and his small staff organize vendors in the marketplaces because they have no access to the state-friendly media. Shumchanka says government agents have confiscated the organization's computers. Perspektyva uses a samizdat network to print simple newsletters and brochures to inform vendors. "We are working underground under the conditions of pre-revolutionary Russia," Shumchanka said, echoing conditions described by other dissidents under Lukashenka's government.

The Perspektyva leader was imprisoned twice in 2005 when thousands of merchants demonstrated against Lukashenka's plan to impose an 18-percent tax on goods imported from Russia. According to the Jamestown Foundation, an American association that promotes democracy in the former Soviet bloc, small entrepreneurs were already contributing nearly a quarter of government revenues through taxes and fees while large state enterprises accounted for less than 10 percent.

Perspektyva and its members have faced other forms of intimidation. The government has threatened to shut down the kiosk trade altogether, and the Brussels-based Office for a Democratic Belarus reports that authorities in Minsk have sought to ban marketplace vendors for sanitary reasons.

PEERING INTO THE FUTURE

Recently, the Prague-based Civic Belarus organization invited Shumchanka and 10 Belarusian merchants to visit Czech shop owners, to share ideas and experiences. "Here we came to the future," the 32-year-old Shumchanka said, saying the visit also inspired him to continue Perspektyva's struggle for change at home.

That may take time. In the absence of effective international pressure to prod Lukashenka into accepting transitional reforms, groups like Perspektyva need grass-roots support. More cross-border exchanges are a start, to help prepare for the day when Belarusians have won their freedom.

But business chambers in Europe also could use their formidable organizing capacity to pressure home governments for more direct pressure on Minsk. If capitalists of the world unite behind these Belarusian merchants, the future they caught a glimpse of in Prague may arrive more quickly.

SPORTS

World Track and Field Championship: 3 medals for Belarus

At the World Track and Field Chanpionship, held in August in Osaka (Japan), Belarusian athletes won 3 medals, all in weight events:

GOLD: *Ivan Tsikhan* in men's hammer throw - 83,63 m.

SILVER: *Nadzeya Astapchuk* in women's shot put - 20,48 m.

BRONZE: *Andrey Mikhnevich* in men's shot put - 21,27 m.

Another Belarusian hope, the decathlon athlete *Andrey Krauchanka* was eliminated after causing two false starts in the 100m. sprint.

Thoughts and Observations

Belarus: Theories Abound In Ouster Of KGB Chief

By Jan Maksymiuk

The chairman of Belarus's State Security Committee (KGB) was dismissed on July 17 -- just days after the KGB publicly boasted of its success in uncovering a spy ring it said was supplying secrets about Belarusian and Russian defense interests to Poland.

Stsyapan Sukharenka assumed the post of KGB chief in December 2004, some two months after a rigged constitutional referendum that allowed President Alyaksandr Lukashenka -- the man who would eventually dismiss him -- to run for president for an unlimited number of terms.

At the time, it was rumored that Sukharenka's predecessor, Leanid Yeryn, lost his job as a result of a friendly conversation he had with a group of activists opposed to Lukashenka's apparent attempts to become president-for-life.

Strong-Arm Tactic

Sukharenka was generally seen as a man who would not permit himself such "liberal gestures" toward the opposition. And he lived up to his reputation in full during the presidential election campaign in 2006, when he publicly denounced Lukashenka opponents as terrorists.

The KGB chief also became notorious for his televised assertion that opposition activists were planning to use dead rats to contaminate Minsk water supplies during the presidential polls in March 2006. He never succeeded, however, in identifying the alleged saboteurs.

So why the sudden ouster? Activist Mikalay Statkevich, who spent nearly two years in prison for organizing anti-Lukashenka protests shortly after the 2004 constitutional referendum, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that it was Sukharenka's lack of professionalism and heavy-handedness in dealing with opponents of the regime that eventually led to his dismissal.

"Sukharenka didn't shine intellectually," Statkevich said. "In general, the Lukashenka era saw the intellectual and professional capabilities of the KGB deteriorate. I say this as a person whom they've worked against. At this point, [their methods] have become extremely coarse -- planting things like narcotics, provoking scuffles, jailing young people. That's the level they operate at."

Pavel Sevyarynets is the former leader of Youth Front, an unofficial opposition group. Like Statkevich, he spent two years in prison for protesting the constitutional referendum. He also said that Sukharenka, for all his efforts at muzzling the opposition, never managed to eradicate it -- a failing in the eyes of Lukashenka and others.

"Sukharenka failed to do away with the Youth Front," Sevyarynets said. "Sukharenka's main task, in terms of political repressions, was to tame the Belarusian youth, the Youth Front in particular. Sukharenka has failed to do that. According to our count, more than 30 criminal cases were opened against Youth Front members during his tenure, including four that are still active."

Dissention In The Ranks?

But Svyatlana Kalinkina, deputy editor in chief of the opposition-minded "Narodnaya volya" daily, said that Sukharenka's sacking may be a result of clan rivalry within Lukashenka's entourage.

"I think there were a number of reasons [for Sukharenka's dismissal]," Kalinkina said. "It occurred because there are plans to consolidate the KGB by subordinating a number of [security] structures from the border troops and the presidential protection service to it. It also may have occurred because of an ongoing clan war, which at any given time sees some people gaining victory over others."

One theory popular among Belarus's nonstate media is that the Interior Ministry is engaged in a permanent power struggle against the KGB. Proponents of this theory see Sukharenka and his first deputy, Vasil Dzemyantsey, who was also fired by Lukashenka on July 17, as the latest victims in this conflict.

In a terse article published in June on the Russian news site gazeta.ru, it was reported that the Belarusian Interior Ministry had arrested an unidentified group of KGB officers on corruption charges.

That report has not been officially confirmed. But following the dismissals of Sukharenka and Dzemyantsey, many commentators in Belarus quickly concluded that they had lost their jobs as a direct result of the Interior Ministry's corruption-related charges.

If that is the case, then last week's public disclosure that the KGB had uncovered a spy ring working for Poland could be seen as a move by Sukharenka to salvage his public image and show that his organization is capable of high-profile successes.

But Sukharenka's time in the limelight was short-lived. Russia's "Kommersant" daily reported on July 17 that it was Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) that had put Belarus's KGB on the trail of the spies.

According to "Kommersant," a Russian national who was part of the ring spying on a Russian-Belarusian joint air-defense system confessed to the FSB, which passed the information on to the KGB in Minsk.

Moscow Machinations?

Other observers have even more radical conclusions, saying it was Moscow that provoked this week's revelations about the spy case, which had remained undisclosed for many months. If that was the case, it might have been because Moscow hoped to prevent Belarus from mending its fences with Poland and embarking on a more independent foreign policy than Russia would like. Kalinkina believes that is a credible theory.

"Many Russian and Belarusian publications confirmed that the [spy] scandal was provoked by Russia," Kalinkina said. "It was provoked at a time when it could coincide with all the events linked to the deployment of the [U.S.] anti-missile defense system in Poland and Russia's withdrawal

from the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe treaty. The spies themselves were detained as early as this past winter. It's likely that in this case, the Belarusian KGB and Stsyapan Sukharenka were playing a Russian game. And it is likely that in Belarus these days, [such games] are not as welcome as they were before."

In Sukharenka's place, Lukashenka appointed Yury Zhadobin, a career military officer with no prior experience in the KGB. Zhadobin is seen as a transitional figure who will most likely be replaced in the fall, when Lukashenka is expected to decide on a new configuration for Belarus's security services.

That decision may bring an answer to the question of who won the war between the Interior Ministry and the KGB. But it may also clarify who will become the president's main adviser on security policy -- Security Council Secretary Viktar Sheyman, or the president's son, Viktar Lukashenka.

Security Suitors

Sheyman is the last high-ranking government official remaining from Lukashenka's election team in 1994, at the start of his presidential career.

Viktar Lukashenka, who is just 31 years old, was appointed to the Security Council in January 2007, automatically gaining status equal to that of the KGB chief or interior minister. His father gave him the task of supervising Belarus's security and law-enforcement agencies.

To observers who enjoy connecting the dots, Sukharenka's dismissal is generally perceived as a gain for Viktar Lukashenka and a loss for Viktar Sheyman, who was seen as having close ties to the ousted KGB chief.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 18, 2007

A Child Fined

Lida Shabetnik from Rechytsa (south-eastern Belarus) is 11 years old. She is very young, but already has a bank account. She needs it in order to receive the state support as a motherless child. Some days ago 539 000 Belarusian rubles (about $ 250) disappeared from her account.

Aleh Shabetnik, Lida's father, went to the bank in order to find out what has happened. It turned out, that the bank secretly withdrew the money… in order to cover the fine, which Aleh has to pay.

Aleh is a member of the regional branch of the Belarusian social-democratic party (Hramada). In February he was fined for allegedly transporting the illegal printed materials over the Belarusian border (some oppositional leaflets). Aleh paid out the fine (1 550 000 rubles – about $720) in rates – 200 000 a month. He still had some months to go, but "Belarusbank" decided to withdraw the rest of the sum from the 11-year-old girl. The bank employees admitted it, but gave no legal reason for such a decision.

All this strongly reminds of Stalin's rule in the 30's, when family members were often (legally!) made responsible for the political "crimes" of their relatives. In Belarus such an opportunity is not foreseen by law. However, "Belarusbank" seems to write its own laws.

Source: http://bulletinonline.org, Nasha Niva Blogs, June 11, 2007

Belarus: Turning the Opposition Into Dissidents

By Jan Maksymiuk

A recent wave of arrests of youth activists in Belarus clearly testifies to the sad reality that the Belarusian authorities do not intend to democratize public life.

But the arrests also show that, following the hotly contested presidential election in March 2006, the ruling regime has considerably marginalized and alienated its opponents. Now Belarusian opposition activists appear to resemble Soviet-era dissidents, rather than competitors in a race for power.

On September 4, a district court in the city of Salihorsk issued an official warning to 16-year-old Ivan Shyla for acting on behalf of the unregistered opposition organization Youth Front. The judge reportedly took into consideration the fact that Shyla is unemployed and a minor, and therefore did not fine or jail him.

The same day, an 18-year-old girl, Nasta Azarka, was tried in the city of Nyasvizh on the same charge as Shyla and fined the equivalent of $600, which is twice as much as the country's official average monthly wage.

Shyla and Azarka were lucky to have gotten off with such light sentences.

In October 2006, Youth Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich was sentenced to 18 months in a correctional institution for being involved in an unregistered organization.

And in August 2006, a district court in Minsk jailed four young people, finding them guilty of running an unregistered organization that "infringes upon the interests and rights of citizens." The four, who wanted to monitor the presidential election on March 19, 2006, were arrested one month before the polls. Mikalay Astreyka was sentenced to two years in jail, Tsimafey Dranchuk to one year, and Enira Branitskaya and Alyaksandr Shalayka to six months each.

Punishments Toned Down

It seems that now, after the wave of opposition protests following the March 2006 presidential election has died down and the opposition are again under strict surveillance and control by the KGB and other law-enforcement bodies, Belarusian judges have been ordered to reduce the severity of punishment for involvement in an unregistered organization.

But the intolerance of the police and the courts toward political protesters continues unabated. During the Shyla trial in Salihorsk, police arrested 11 young people who came to show solidarity with their associate in front of the courthouse. Seven of them were jailed or fined by the same court the following day.

"We have selective repressions. Given that Belarusians are a nation of timid individualists, the authorities strike at the headquarters and the leaders. In essence, they jail very few people, but intimidate millions," opposition leader Mikalay Statkevich, who spent two years in prison in 2005-2007, told the Belarusian independent newspaper *Svaboda* in July.

Moreover, the Justice Ministry remains as adamant as ever with regard to registering opposition-minded organizations. It has already rejected half a dozen registration requests from the Youth Front, always finding some formal irregularities in documents submitted for registration. Confining the Youth Front to its illegal status, of course, makes it easier for law enforcers to pacify its members.

There are also signs that the Justice Ministry, under various formal pretexts, wants to outlaw most opposition parties in Belarus ahead of legislative polls in 2008, in order to make life for oppositionists in Belarus even more difficult.

"In essence, they jail very few people, but intimidate millions,"
Mikalay Statkevich

Opposition Parties Closed

In August, the Justice Ministry suspended the legal status of the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists for three months. The ministry had issued warnings over paperwork irregularities and the party's participation in the founding conference of a Belarusian left-wing alliance, which took place not in Belarus, as required by legislation, but in Ukraine, because the alliance was unable to lease a venue for the conference in its home country.

On September 12, the Supreme Court held a preliminary hearing on a suit by the Justice Ministry to shut down the opposition Women's Party "Hope."

Thus, after pushing out the opposition from parliament in 1996, the regime has now apparently decided to push its opponents outside even the precarious framework of legitimacy they have enjoyed so far.

But even for those parties that don't face closure, their activities in Belarus are now fairly similar to those of Soviet-era dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s.

Belarusian oppositionists are basically allowed to remain free, but the authorities have managed to restrict their influence to the atomized circles of mostly urban intelligentsia that are opposition-minded even without any outside encouragement. As for the overwhelming majority of ordinary Belarusians, they appear to be ignorant not only of the opposition's goals, but also about its very existence.

Failure To Communicate

Such a situation cannot be blamed on the regime's repressive machinery and information blockade alone.

Many critics of the Belarusian opposition point out that its goals and slogans, particularly regarding democratic transformations and European integration, are very far from present-day concerns and expectations of most Belarusians.

Belarusian writer Svyatlana Aleksiyevich told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service earlier this week that she cannot help feeling that the opposition groups "are just clubs for harboring illusions." "The Social Democrats have one illusion, the Communists have another, and the United Civic Party has yet another. In other words, they have no base among ordinary people," she continued. Addressing those parties, Aleksiyevich asked, "Why is there such a gap between you and your own people?"

The hopes that the Belarusian opposition could mobilize wider social support behind former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich died at an opposition congress this past May.

Instead of formulating a clear-cut and consistent alternative to the authoritarian rule of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka -- which was particularly vulnerable at that time, following a painful Russian gas price hike at the beginning of 2007 -- the congress spent almost all of its energy squabbling about leadership.

In effect, Milinkevich was dismissed as head of the Political Council of United Pro-democratic Forces, which instead received four co-chairs to please major opposition factions. "The fight for power in the country has been replaced by a fight for power among the opposition," Milinkevich aptly commented on the congress. The social momentum for change generated by the opposition during the March 2006 presidential campaign, not very impressive to begin with, was irretrievably wasted.

On September 12, the Political Council of United Pro-democratic Forces appealed to individuals with no party affiliation to become candidates on the opposition list in next year's parliamentary elections.

Desperate as it looks at first glance, the appeal nevertheless seems to be a reasonable attempt at bridging the gap between the elitist circle of Belarusian opposition politics and society as a whole. At any rate, it makes more sense for the Belarusian opposition to seek understanding among people in its own country than abroad. If they fail to find such understanding this time, they may be called dissidents without any reservations.

Source: RFE-RL, September 13, 2007



Yaraslau Hryshchenya

«Execute me!»

«I ask the court to order the execution of me by shooting», said Yaraslau Hryshchenya in his final word during his trial. This was his way of mocking the state regime, which persecutes people for their political beliefs. The public prosecutor asked to sentence Young Front activist to 1 year in prison. The judge decided, however, that Yaraslau should be fined with 930,000 rubles (about $ 430).

Source: *Nasha Niva* NearBY Blogs, 12/9/2007

New Europe Battles Lukashenka

By Brian Whitmore

PRAGUE, June 21, 2007 -- When Yauhen Skrabatun volunteered to work on Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich's presidential campaign in early 2006, he was promptly expelled from university.

That's when the Polish government stepped in and offered him the opportunity to continue his studies in Warsaw.

In addition to getting a good education in Poland, where he is studying linguistics, Skrabatun is also learning a thing or two about opposition politics -- from activists who successfully fought against communist rule there two decades ago.

"I meet with people in Poland who fought against the communist regime and I gain experience from them," Skrabatun said. "They tell me how it was for them and they understand how it is for me. They know what I am talking about because they had the same situation." "They are our ambassadors to old Europe, because there people don't always know what it is to live in a society of fear."

His experience in Poland, Skrabatun says, has helped him to more effectively battle Alyaksandr Lukashenka's authoritarian regime:

"Every week I go to Belarus and do the same things I was doing before I left for Poland," Skrabatun said. "Perhaps now I have even more strength and more possibilities because in Poland I made new acquaintances and contacts with international organizations that can help us."

Safe Haven For Students

Skrabatun is among hundreds of Belarusian students who were kicked out of school for political reasons and taken in by Polish universities.

Other former communist countries who are now EU members -- like the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Estonia -- are also admitting Belarusian students who have run afoul of the regime. When Lukashenka closed down Minsk's European Humanities University in 2004, for example, Lithuania agreed to host the EU-funded institution in Vilnius.

Giving opposition-minded students a safe place to study -- and a safe haven for their political activism -- isn't the only way Europe's newest democracies are battling the continent's last dictatorship.

From taking in political asylum seekers, to financing independent media, to pressing the European Union to take a stronger stand on human rights violations, the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe have become the beleaguered Belarusian opposition's best friends on the continent.

"On the one hand there is moral assistance, moral support," said Ilya Hlybouski, a native of Belarus who works for the Prague-based humanitarian organization People In Need.

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka (TASS)

"For example [former Czech President] Vaclav Havel is always writing letters regarding events in Belarus and is always trying to morally assist the Belarusian opposition," he said. "The same is true of the [communist-era] opposition and dissidents in Poland. On the other hand, there is technical and material aide for the Belarusian opposition and Belarusian democrats."

The Czech Republic, for example, has taken in nearly 300 political asylum seekers from Belarus.

The Polish government last year began financing Radio Racja, which broadcasts uncensored news into Belarus in both the Belarusian and Russian languages. Warsaw is also preparing to begin satellite television broadcasts into Belarus.

Moreover, the Polish, Czech, and Lithuanian governments have become increasingly outspoken inside the European Union about opposing human rights violations in Belarus.

Old vs New Europe

Belarusian opposition activists say such lobbying is important, especially since Europe's old powers like France and Germany have often been wary of alienating Minsk's ally Russia.

"They are...our ambassadors to old Europe, because there people don't always know what it is to live in a society of fear. They haven't lived in such a society in a long time, and some never have," Belarusian opposition politician Alyaksandr Milinkevich told RFE/RL on the sidelines of a recent conference in Prague.

"So when I talk to leaders of these countries, I ask them, 'Be our ambassadors there. The time will come when we will have our own people, but for now we need you,' and they fulfill this function."

A specialist in the former Soviet Union at the German Council on Foreign Relations, Alexander Rahr, says the new EU members have sparked a "heated debate" in Brussels about its policy toward Russia -- and by extension toward Belarus, and Ukraine.

"I must say that they do it very intelligently. They bring their arguments forward," Rahr said. "They have maybe what the old West does not have, they have moral political arguments having been victims of the Soviet past, of communism, which they bring to these discussions, where of course the old Europeans cannot contradict."

Strategic Concerns

Eugeniusz Smolar, head of the Warsaw-based Center for International Relations, says that his government and others in the region are motivated by a strong sense of moral obligation.

"We had been enjoying the help of the Western trade unions, the American Congress and President [Ronald] Reagan and President [Jimmy] Carter before, and the Polish hero [former U.S. National Security Advisor] Zbigniew Brzezinski," Smolar, who himself was imprisoned by

Poland's communist regime in 1968 after protesting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, said.

"As you know, they were very active in applying human rights as a measure of success in international relations, or let's say as a measure of decency," he added. "So the same goes with us. Generally speaking, the Poles are democratically inclined people and they would like to help and they accept that such help is being offered to people less fortunate, especially those who are our neighbors."

But Smolar says Poland's stance is also partially pragmatic -- the desire to have a stable and democratic neighbor to the east.

"I believe it is pretty natural to have a neighbor, which is democratic, prosperous, predictable, not showing signs of behaving like the old Soviet type of state. Because there is always increased insecurity [about] what they might do, not only to their own population, but also in terms of foreign relations," Smolar said.

But despite the support abroad from the new EU members, Smolar said sooner or later Belarus's deeply divided opposition will need to show results at home.

"You know, success breeds success. If the Belarusian opposition cannot show positive results it is very difficult to gather support in Europe."

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, June 29,2007

HISTORICAL DATES

August 6, 1517

Francis Skaryna of Polatsak printed the first book in Belarusian - the Bible - in Prague.

August 9, 1910

Birthdate of the Belarusian poetess **Larysa Hienijush,** in the town of Zelva.

August 14, 1385

The dynastic Union of **Kreva** was signed betwen the Grand Duchy of Litva and the Kingdom of Poland - its purpose being a common defense against the aggression of the German Teutonic Order. Under the terms of this treaty Grand Duke Jahajla married the Polish princess Jadwiga, and became the King of Poland. The dynastic union thus created a federation of Two Nations.

September 2-29, 1621

Anniversary of the **Battle of Khotsim,** when the 70,000 strong united army of the Republic of Two Nations (Grand Duchy of Litva and Poland), under the leadership of Litva's top hetman Jan Karol Chadkievic defeated the Turk-Tatar forces of 220,000 men.

September 8, 1514

Anniversary of the **Battle of Vorsha,** when a military force of about 30,000 men, led by hetman Konstantin Astroski of the Grand Duchy of Litva defeated a Muscovite army of cca. 80,000 men near the town of Vorsha.

Since 1991 this date has been celebrated as the **Day of Belarusian Military Glory.**

Not a Day Without a Conspiracy

Uladzimir Khalip

The local Goddess of Justice executes a new directive. A criminal case has arisen, this time in Salihorsk. The accusation to be presented is hideous - membership in a non-registered organization. Hearing the accusation, one's thoughts turn toward the obvious radical groups. Hezbollah? Hamas? Al Qaeda?

No way. No logics can help here.

The seditious organization that one can be punished for being a member of is "Malady Front", and the man standing before the high court is Ivan Shyla.

A criminal case is no small matter. It requires much effort to prepare it and to bring it to court. But who is the individual that the stronghold of justice fell upon?

Yes, indeed, this "Malady Front" really does exist. Everyone has seen its members at demonstrations, in picket lines, at different protests. Well-brought up. Well-read. Not the kind of people who would even drop a paper in the street. And our powers are perfectly aware of that. And if so, why make such a a fuss?

It has not registered yet, has it? Then further elucidation is required. Questions remain. One can attempt to discern what is happening, attempt to seek consensus. The police should do what is needed - deal with the real crimes that are shaking this model-country. What a disgrace! A mighty army of various OMON and other Special Forces warriors, who terrify just with their looks, had been hunting outlaws in Homel and were unable to seize them for 10 years. Every local kid knew the names of those outlaws, and yet, the police were the only ones who were left to solve this "puzzle".

In another situation, some hooligans in Zhlobin believed they could behave as they pleased, consequently attempting to seize the pride of our industry - the local metallurgical plant.

Yet, with such truly challenging cases, the knights of law and order feel compelled to chase boys and girls, to punish them for shouting (Lord forbid!) "Long Live Belarus!"

This failed hunt of inocents has been going on forever. Untamed offspring of our iron fellow-citizen Felix Dzerzhynski cannot calm down. They exposed an atrocious anti-USSR conspiracy in the late 40s. And where did they discover it? In pedagogical colleges! The 17-year old enemies of the country demanded to study - imagine that! - in Belarusian. Of course, those conspirators were charged and sentenced to 25 years, or to 10 years (for those who did not denounce), or to capital punishment.

In the 1960s, during the well-known Khrushchev's "thaw", the great Extraordinary Committee officers again exposed a plot in Minsk universities - by anti-Soviet students. Times were different, and the case didn't reach the court. But every plotter was expelled - from institutes, music academies and universities. And it was fair: during hostel searches, among other seditious materials, White Guardist Mikhail Bulgakov's novel "Dog's Heart," printed on thin cheap paper (worn out after numerous readings), was discovered.

The 1970s saw one even more horrible conspiracy. And where do you think? In the Academy of Sciences! Belarusian nationalists this time.

That is the way we live - one conspiracy after another. Our country has suffered a great deal! How should we survive all these threats? In vain, people hope for change. And in

vain, the OSCE urges the powers not to exploit imprisonment for political purposes. How can we explain to those naive Europeans that the country cannot cannot abandon the path that was chosen long ago and will never change? We are too passive to change our direction. And we live with eternal threats, the main one being the use of 250 thousand soldiers of the special forces - they cannot sit still in their offices. They should work. They should present irrefutable evidences to their management daily, to prove their necessity.

So, here they present this evidence; this time Ivan Shyla acts as the main exhibit. "Malady Front" is just the beginning! Soon it will be the pensioners' turn - there are so many discontented among them. Sooner or later, another conspiracy will emerge.

...A column of mostly "Malady Front" members was marching along a road. They were marching on top of places where officers of the National Interior Committee executed thousands of political prisoners. A storm started, it was thundering. But nobody stepped away from the road. Then they moved on to stand in front of a cross of sufferings. A priest was reading a prayer. A girl of 15 was keeping a white-red-white flag. The rain grew stronger. Someone passed an umbrella to the girl. She refused to take it - she was attempting to unfold the flag so that it could be seen from the road.

Whom are you fighting , Gentlemen?

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, July 10, 2007

No Comment ...

My friends, whose children attend lower grades of a Belarusian middle school, told me recently an interesting and instructive story. One day their 1-year-old child said: " We were told in school not to tell anyone, but I will tell you secretly that today we were filling out a questionnaire."

"What kind of questionnaire again ?" asked the parents.

"Well, about patriotism ..."

"And what questions were there, at least?" - asked the flabbergasted parents.

"Well, how often do you watch TV, do you watch Belarusian news, what is your attitude towards our state, what do your parents say about our president and so on," - revealed the daughter.

So they began to investigate, and it turned out that, indeed, the school polling was conducted and children were advised not to tell adults. Later it became known that this was happening not only in their school.

The director of a neighboring school refused to conduct this poll, and so did a few individual teachers, some even sacrificing their jobs.

Do you know what your child is being taught today?

This is not 1984; it is 2007 !!!

Source: Blog POZIRK, August 7, 2007 .

Varanetski scared Russia

The Russian mass media responded particularly negatively to the fact that the deputy foreign minister of Belarus participated in the international conference "Working together on facilitation of the European neighborhood policy" in Brussels.

Thus, the Russian *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* writes that "Minsk is trying to improve its relations with Europe. Recently it behaved as the victim of the Moscow's energy dictatorship. The European Commission is looking for methods to restrict the access of Russian companies to its energy market. Threats on the part of Russia are imaginary, invented. De facto, Russian companies are very responsible with respect to their commitments. They are hardly to be accused of inconsistency or of evoking risks for European consumers. And now it is the deputy foreign minister of Belarus, Varanetski, who is ready to come and help the European Commission. Playing the role of Russia's perfidy victim, Minsk has started selling itself to Europe in the hope of relaxation of sanctions. The very act of granting visa to the Belarus' top-ranked foreign ministry official, evidences improvement of the issue".

According to the periodical, "the behavior of Belarus towards Russia appears thankless and disobedient. In 2007 Russia gave actual USD 5.8 subsidies to Belarus for gas and oil payments. And should anyone be dissatisfied with Russia after receiving money? Furthermore, Minsk didn't take any steps toward integration with Russia even previously, when it received the resources at more beneficial prices. It sharply refused to introduce the common currency. So, to put it differently, Lukashenka has been strengthening his regime to his liking on Russian money."

"It is necessary to put an end to this vicious practice of political pricing for energy resources," the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* continues. It is not transparent and does not serve Russia's interests. We can't afford to lose the budget proceeds resulting from such pricing, which is too low. It is necessary to adopt a bill directing state-owned companies to export raw materials and goods at world accepted prices. The resolution on subsidies should be made by the State Duma, within the framework of rendering assistance to foreign states. In this case, the conditions of assistance rendering will definitely be prescribed. If you want to get USD 5.8 billion for subsidizing the expenses of your population, be so kind as to do this and that".

The news story ends with the following:

"You say 'dictatorship,' don't you? And who in the world would give billions of dollars to anyone for nothing? Without pursuing a national strategic interest? A restriction of sovereignty - yes, certainly. Yet, what kind of sovereignty can speak of USD 5.8 billion subsidies amounting to 41% of the Belarusian state budget? This mechanism is to become a real tool, for real integration. In several years Minsk will either put its strategy in conformity with the Russian agenda, or not. But then it will mean another history for Belarus".

Source: Charter 97 press Center, September 4, 2007

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

July 2, 2007

BELARUSIAN MINISTRY DENIES REGISTRATION TO MILINKEVICH-LED MOVEMENT

Belarus's Justice Ministry has refused to register the Movement for Freedom led by former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service and Belapan reported on July 21. The ministry cited flaws in the movement's charter as the grounds for its decision. The Movement for Freedom was established at a congress in Hrodna in May. The primary goals of the movement are building civil society in Belarus, ensuring the country's independence, and staging fully democratic elections. Movement for Freedom Deputy Chairman Viktar Karnyayenka told RFE/RL that the denial of registration comes as no surprise for the organization. "This decision falls within the general [official] trend of suppressing various civic actions and terminating the activities of all legal structures in the country apart from those controlled by the authorities. We will continue both our registration efforts and our activities, which are not dependent on our registration," Karnyayenka said.

Aug. 7, 2007

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER APPEALS TO EUROPE OVER DEVASTATION OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich has urged Terry Davis, the secretary-general of the Council of Europe, to help save historic buildings in Hrodna, a city in northwestern Belarus, Belapan reported on August 6. Milinkevich wrote in his appeal that authorities have planned to demolish around 70 "valuable" buildings in Hrodna as part of a project to redevelop its historic center. "Construction work is being carried out in violation of Belarusian regulations governing the conservation of cultural heritage, with archeological fundamentals ignored. To attempts by representatives of the intelligentsia to begin dialogue about the most optimum way of preserving Hrodna's historic complex, authorities reply with police patrols, administrative sanctions, and the defamation by the official media of alternative projects," Milinkevich added. Last week, construction workers in Hrodna completed the demolition of a building that was part of the 18th-century palace of Hrodna's administrator. The demolition was condemned by local history enthusiasts as an act of vandalism.

Sept. 11, 2007

BELARUSIAN SMALL BUSINESSMEN PROTEST DECREE ON EMPLOYMENT RESTRICTION

Some 1,000 owners of small and family firms took part in rallies in Minsk, Homel, and Vitsebsk on September 10 to protest a presidential decree of December 2006, which forbids them to employ people other than three family members as of 2008, Belapan reported. The rally in Minsk adopted an open statement to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka denouncing his decree. "The introduction of the restriction that only three workers may be employed exclusively from among family members is above all aimed against young people and former employees of state organizations and agencies in provinces. The measure will lead to mass reductions and social tensions that will later turn into political ones. Tens of thousands of families will lose their income. The country's budget will lose. The entire country will lose in general," the statement reads.

2. BELARUS & the WORLD

July 2, 2007

VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT VISITS 'BROTHER' IN BELARUS

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on June 29 arrived in Minsk, where he met his Belarusian counterpart Alyaksandr Lukashenka and vowed to pursue joint economic projects to consolidate their ties, AP, Reuters, and Belapan reported. "There are few peoples in the world who endure such strong pressure from the empire as Belarus. In this struggle we are brothers," Chavez told Lukashenka in Minsk. "The enemy's forces are trying to turn the world into a unipolar world. We must overcome many obstacles from these forces. The empire that has called us dictatorships itself wants to create a world dictatorship," Chavez added. Both presidents reportedly praised the dynamic economic cooperation between their countries. "If in one year we were able to do so much, then what will be able to do in the 20 years that we will be in power?" Chavez asked. "Don't scare the Americans," Lukashenka responded with a smile. Chavez reportedly promised that his country will increase the import of Belarusian television sets, tractors, electronic equipment, and various machines. "In the future, we'll be able to jointly occupy considerable market niches in Latin America, satisfying the real demand of people for food, building materials, household appliances, medicines, and machine-building products," Chavez noted

July 1, 2007

OSCE CALLS ON BELARUS TO MOVE CLOSER TO EUROPE

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly on July 9 adopted a resolution calling on the Belarusian government to take advantage of the EU's Neighborhood Initiative, Belapan reported. The document, adopted at the Parliamentary Assembly's meeting in Kyiv, also urges Belarus to abide by its international commitments, bring its Electoral Code into line with OSCE standards, respect the right to freedom of expression and access to independent media, and "respect the rights of nongovernmental organizations as a vital part of a healthy democracy by no longer hindering their legal existence, harassing and prosecuting members of NGOs, and allowing them to receive international assistance." The resolution calls on the Belarusian authorities to release all political prisoners and investigate the disappearances of four opponents of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Belarusian delegates to the OSCE described the resolution as wrong and unfair, claiming that all participating states have "problems" with abiding by their OSCE commitments, and that democratization is an "evolutionary process"

July 13, 2007

BELARUS TO BEGIN DRILLING OIL FIELDS IN VENEZUELA THIS YEAR

Belarus and Venezuela intend to begin joint oil production this year, Belapan reported, citing the Belarusian Security Council's press service. The matter is on the agenda of an official Belarusian delegation's visit to Venezuela that began on July 9 and will con-

tinue until July 14). Belarus and Venezuela have reportedly set up a joint enterprise called VenBelnafta aimed at drilling several mature Venezuelan fields with modern technology. According to the Security Council, the Belarusian delegation will also discuss the possibility of setting up an "investment fund" to finance joint projects. Venezuela is to contribute $500 million to the fund, the council's press service said, but did not disclose how much Belarus would provide.

July 20, 2007

BELARUSIAN ROCK-MUSIC FESTIVAL OPENS IN POLAND

A three-day rock-music festival called Basovishcha began on July 19 in a forest near the town of Grodek in Bialystok Voivodship, northeastern Poland, Polish media reported. Basovishcha is an annual music event organized in mid-July by the Belarusian Association of Students, an organization representing Poland's Belarusian minority. The first festival was staged in 1990. Although not overtly political, Basovishcha offers its stage primarily to young opposition-minded Belarusian musicians and performers blacklisted in Belarus for political reasons. The festival draws several thousand music fans from Poland and Belarus each year, and is practically the only high-profile music event where Belarusian music-lovers can see their favorite performers onstage. This year's Basovishcha, the 18th consecutive festival, features more than 30 bands, mainly from Belarus, but also several from Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland. Radio Racja, a Belarusian-language radio station based in Bialystok, broadcast several hours of live performances from the festival on July 19, and is doing the same on July 20. Radio Racja's programs are available online at http://www.racyja.com.

Aug. 7, 2007

MORE EXPELLED BELARUSIAN STUDENTS TO STUDY IN POLAND

Ala Karol, the coordinator of the Belarusian opposition's committee for support of political victims, told Belapan on August 6 that 44 students who were expelled from Belarusian universities will be provided with training under the Polish government's Kastus Kalinouski educational-assistance program for politically persecuted Belarusians this year. The Kastus Kalinouski program was instituted in March 2006 by the Polish prime minister and the rectors of several Polish universities for Belarusian students punished earlier that year for their participation in the campaigns of opposition presidential candidates or postelection protests. More than 200 young Belarusians were reportedly enrolled in Poland last year. This year's applicants -- who mostly opted for places on courses in economy, sociology, history, Belarusian studies, and arts — will begin their studies in September after taking a course in the Polish and English languages

Aug. 29, 2007

RUSSIAN DIPLOMAT BACKS DOWN ON STATEMENT ABOUT DEPLOYMENT OF NUKES IN BELARUS

Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov on August 28 denied that he said Russia might consider deploying nuclear facilities in Belarus in response to the U.S. plans to expand its missile-defense shield to Eastern Europe, Belapan reported. "Russia has no plans to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus. I didn't say what was reported that I said," Surikov told journalists in Minsk. When asked by Interfax on August 27 whether Russia would deploy new military facilities in Belarus in response to the U.S. missile-shield plans, Surikov reportedly said plans "depend on the level of our political integration [with Belarus]. "The only [nuclear weapons] that might be deployed in Belarus without violating international agreements are tactical nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, there are no formal documents forbidding [that]," Andrey Fyodarau, a Belarusian expert in international relations, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service on August 28. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Belarus, along with Ukraine and Kazakhstan, agreed to destroy all strategic nuclear warheads that were located on its territory or turn them over to Russia. Belarus became a nuclear-weapons-free state in November 1996.

Aug. 31, 2007

POLAND TO ACCEPT MORE THAN 60 BELARUSIAN STUDENTS

Ina Kuley told Belapan on August 29 that in October Polish universities will accept at least 63 Belarusian students who encountered problems with studying in Belarus because of political persecution. Kuley, who is the wife of Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich, chairs the Solidarity committee providing assistance to Belarusians who have suffered for political reasons. Kuley said that in the selected group, 44 students were expelled from Belarusian universities on politically motivated charges, while 19 were subject to other forms of political harassment. In March 2006, the Polish government launched the Kastus Kalinouski educational-assistance program, under which more than 200 young Belarusians who were punished for their participation in opposition activities and protests were enrolled in universities in Poland last year.

Sept. 7, 2007

EU SCOLDS BELARUS OVER OPPOSITION ARRESTS

European Commission spokeswoman Christiane Hohmann said in Brussels on September 6 that the EU is "dismayed" over recent arrests of opposition youth activists in Belarus, RFE/RL reported. "The repetition of politically motivated arrests which we have observed over the recent months is not an encouraging sign for Belarus's willingness to reengage fully with the European Union," Hohmann added. The previous day, two young opposition activists were jailed for seven days each, while five others were fined for protesting the trial of their associate, Ivan Shyla. Hohmann rejected the offer of deeper economic cooperation in the field of energy transit made by Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Varanetski on September 3 at a European Neighborhood Policy conference in Brussels. "A rapprochement with the EU requires that Belarus takes convincing steps towards democratization and respect for human rights, including the right of people to express their opinion, and the right of NGOs to exist," she noted.

Sept. 19, 2007

EU MAKES TALKS ON ENERGY SECURITY WITH BELARUS CONTINGENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner told a group of Belarusian journalists in Brussels on September 18 that negotiations between the EU and Belarus on energy security are only possible if the human-rights situation in the country improves, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. She noted that EU and Belarusian experts met in June to talk about energy issues. Their second meeting was scheduled for October, but the EU decided to postpone it indefinitely, following a recent wave of arrests of youth activists in Belarus. "We feel there is a lack of political will [on the Belarusian side] to establish cooperation. We cannot work with the last dictatorial regime in Eu-

rope," Ferrero-Waldner said. Earlier this month, at a European Neighborhood Policy conference in Brussels, Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Varanetski called on the EU to cooperate in the field of energy transit

3. ECONOMY

July 30, 2007

MOSCOW TENTATIVELY APPROVES GAS LOAN TO BELARUS

The Russian government has given preliminary approval to Belarus's request for a loan, which will be partially spent on paying off the country's debt to Russia's Gazprom gas monopoly, Belapan reported on July 27, quoting Russian Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin. Earlier this year Belarus asked Moscow for a $1.5 billion stabilization loan, following an increase in gas prices in January. "This is preliminary approval, and the final decision will be taken by the government in the form of amendments to the budget," Kudrin told journalists on July 27. He added that Moscow is now considering the amount and terms of the loan.

Aug. 1, 2007

BELARUSIAN PREMIER SAYS ONE-THIRD OF ECONOMY IS LOSS-MAKING

Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski said at a government conference in Minsk on July 31 that "one-third of the economy" in Belarus is actually unprofitable, Belapan reported. Sidorski said the share of unprofitable enterprises now amounts to some 17-18 percent of the total number in the country, but added that among large companies subordinated to the Ministry of Industry loss-making ones account for 31 percent. "If small economic entities, cafes, and other food services providers are not taken into account, we'll see a generally bad situation behind the aggregate figures," Sidorski noted. The same day, the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis reported that Belarus' foreign-trade deficit in the first six months of 2007 increased by 93 percent compared to the first half of 2006, reaching some $1.8 billion. Russia's share in Belarus's foreign trade increased as well, reaching 48.3 percent. Belarusian experts link the recent increase in Belarus's foreign-trade deficit to a decrease in Belarus's re-exports of refined Russian oil, following the imposition by Russia in December 2006 of a duty of $180 per ton of Russian crude exported to Belarus

Aug. 3, 2007

GAZPROM EXTENDS THREAT OF GAS CUT TO BELARUS

Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov said on the Ekho Moskvy radio station on August 3 that if Belarus fails to pay the remaining part of its gas debt within a week as it has promised, Gazprom will cut its gas supplies by 30 percent, which will be proportionate to the actual payment. "If we give full liberty in this matter, there will be no guarantees that we'll receive the money owed to us," Kupriyanov added. On August 2, Belarus paid $190 million of the $456 million it owes to Gazprom. On August 1, Gazprom threatened to reduce gas supplies to Belarus by 45 percent as of August 3 over the unpaid debt, but postponed the reduction by one week after Minsk made the $190 million payment. Speaking on August 3 on Russia's TV-Tsentr, Kupriyanov denied media speculation that Gazprom's ultimatum to Belarus to pay off its gas debt was caused by Gazprom's intention to buy stakes in other key Belarusian enterprises such as oil refineries. "Beltranshaz [Belarus' pipeline operator] is what we really would like to get. We agreed on how we would buy half of this enterprise, agreed on how this company would operate after we got 50 percent, and we so far don't have any additional new ideas," Kupriyanov noted

Aug. 8, 2007

BELARUS REPAYS GAS DEBT TO RUSSIA

The Belarusian government has repaid its $456 million debt to Russian gas monopoly Gazprom for gas deliveries in the first half of 2007, Belapan reported on August 8, citing Gazprom's press service. Last week Gazprom threatened to cut gas supplies to Belarus by 45 percent over the unpaid debt. Belarusian First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka told journalists on August 8 that Belarus is now going to pay for Russian gas deliveries in full and in a timely manner. "It will be difficult for us. But the honor, dignity, and reputation of our country should be above all," Syamashka noted.

Aug. 21, 2007

ONE-FIFTH OF BELARUSIAN INDUSTRIAL COMPANIES IN THE RED

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, 444 Belarusian industrial enterprises, or 20.3 percent of all such companies, operated at a loss in the first six months of 2007, Belapan reported on August 20. Their net losses totaled 216 billion rubles ($100 million), 27 percent more than in the same period the previous year.

Aug. 22, 2007

BELARUS RECEIVES SOVEREIGN CREDIT RATINGS

The financial services company Standard and Poor's has assigned a B+ foreign-currency long-term sovereign credit rating, a BB local-currency rating, and a B short-term sovereign rating to Belarus, Belapan reported on August 21. Standard and Poor's said the ratings reflect the state's domination of the Belarusian economy, the country's weak external liquidity, and the uniquely centralized nature of the Belarusian political system, which reduces the predictability of policy choices. On the other hand, the company noted that the ratings are supported by comparatively high wealth and development levels, low general government debt, a relatively strong external balance sheet, and significant economic potential due to substantial industrial capital stock and a highly educated workforce. A country's sovereign credit rating is a reflection of confidence in its ability to honor its hard-currency borrowing commitments. Belarus' Finance Ministry welcomed the ratings in a statement on August 21, saying they will lead to a significant increase in foreign investment inflows to Belarus.

Sept. 4, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT VOWS TO STOP SUBSIDIZING UNPROFITABLE FARMS

While visiting a farm in Minsk Oblast on September 1, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka reiterated his earlier warning that the government will scale down aid to the agricultural sector, and will subsidize only profitable farms, Belapan reported. Lukashenka elaborated by saying that subsidies will be given only for specific agricultural projects expected to yield a profit. "We will probably issue interest-free loans or even donate money" for such projects, he said. "We need an economy of the future. That's why we will be giving money only to those directors who are able to guarantee that the project will live up to their promises." The same day, Lukashenka also inaugurated a newly built school in Minsk Oblast, where he spoke about the education sector .

Some Belarusian independent media reported that in Lukashenka's speeches, he notably failed to comment on a suggestion made last week by Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov that Russia might consider deploying nuclear weapons in Belarus. Surikov's pronouncement made headlines in the world media.

Sept. 4, 2007

IMF PREDICTS BELARUSIAN LOSSES DUE TO HIGHER ENERGY PRICES

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicts that the increased price of Russian gas for Belarus, along with unfavorable new terms of trade in crude oil and petroleum products, may result in losses estimated at 10-15 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2012, Belapan reported on August 31. "Belarus now pays Russia twice as much for gas supplies as in 2006, and one-fifth more as a share of world market prices for crude oil. This results in an estimated loss of 5 1/2 percent of GDP in 2007, of which about 1 1/2 percentage points could be offset by higher export prices and lower energy intensity of production. Subsequent losses will be smaller, particularly if additional declines in energy intensity occur, but cumulative losses through 2012 may reach 10-15 percent of GDP," the IMF said in a note published after the end of consultations with Belarus last week.

Sept. 6, 2007

BELARUS SIGNS DEAL TO DEVELOP OIL FIELD IN IRAN

Belarus on September 5 signed a contract to engage in oil exploration in Iran, Belarusian and international news agencies reported. The contract, inked in Tehran, grants Belarus access to the Jofeir oil field near the border with Iraq, which could yield up to 30,000 barrels of oil per day once it becomes operational. Alyaksandr Lyakhau, the chief executive of the Belarusian oil company Belarusnafta, was quoted as saying that funds for the exploration project will come from the Vietnamese energy company Petrovietnam, with personnel and equipment supplied by Belarusnafta and the Iranian Oil Ministry.

Sept. 19, 2007

BELARUS'S FOREIGN-TRADE DEFICIT SOARS IN 2007

The Ministry of Statistics and Analysis has revealed that Belarus's foreign-trade deficit in the first seven months of 2007 amounted to $2 billion, Belapan reported. In the same period of 2006, the foreign-trade deficit stood at $990 million. The ministry explained that the deficit was primarily due to increased imports of "intermediate products," such as energy, raw materials, and components. Following the rise in Russian gas prices and oil-export duties as of January, Belarus also registered a deficit of $790 million in trade in energy in the first seven months of 2007, compared with a surplus of $226 million in the same period of 2006.

4. REGIME ACTIONS & STATEMENTS

June 26, 2007

FORMER BELARUSIAN OIL EXECUTIVE CHARGED WITH EMBEZZLEMENT

Belarusian Prosecutor-General Pyotr Miklashevich told journalists in Minsk on June 25 that Alyaksandr Barouski, former head of the State Petrochemical Industry Concern (Belnaftakhim), has been charged with embezzlement, abuse of office, and disclosure of secret information, Belarusian media reported. Barouski, along with several other heads of state-run and private companies, was arrested last month by the Belarusian KGB). "At this time [Barouski] is being presented with the official charges," Miklashevich said. "Other persons are also being charged. This is in connection with supplies of oil products. Losses, naturally, amount to millions of dollars."

June 27, 2007

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES BLOCK INITIATIVE TO AMEND LABOR-CONTRACT SYSTEM

The Central Election Commission (TsVK) on June 26 denied registration to a group that hoped to change the country's fixed-term labor-contract system, Belapan reported. The group -- led by Henadz Fyadynich, leader of the Belarusian Union of Electronics Industry Workers — needed TsVK registration to launch a campaign to initiate changes to labor laws that would scrap the fixed-term contract requirement for employees. The group planned to collect 50,000 signatures, which would make it possible to put the issue on the agenda of the Chamber of Representatives, Belarus' lower legislative chamber. The TsVK argued that the group's founding conference in May was attended by 246 people, while at least 248 were required for the 495-strong group to be registered. The TsVK also said the changes to labor laws proposed by the group are inconsistent with the constitution and other regulations. Fyadynich told journalists later the same day that he will continue pushing amendments to the contract system, which he described as "slave-like." President Alyaksandr Lukashenka introduced a short-term contract system for employees of state-owned businesses in 2004, replacing the previous life-term one. The system has been extensively criticized by the Belarusian opposition and independent trade unionists, who assert that the government uses it to dismiss independent union members and opposition political activists.

June 28, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT'S WEBSITE LAUNCHES BELARUSIAN-LANGUAGE VERSION

The official website of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka (http://www.wpresident.gov.by) on June 27 inaugurated a Belarusian-language version, in addition to its Russian- and English-language ones. Since the start of his presidential career, Lukashenka has been known for his overt disdain for the native tongue of the Belarusians. In a notoriously derisive comment in 1994, he declared that there are only two great languages in the world—Russian and English. "The people who speak the Belarusian language cannot do anything else apart from speaking the Belarusian language, because it's impossible to express anything great in Belarusian," he asserted. In May 1995, Lukashenka called a referendum that made Russian the second official language in the country. In practical terms, the 1995 referendum has eliminated the Belarusian language, which enjoyed a measure of state-sponsored revival in 1991-93, almost completely from public life and state-controlled media in Belarus.

July 18, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SACKS KGB CHIEF

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on July 17 dismissed Stsyapan Sukharenka as chairman of the State Security Committee (KGB) and Vasil Dzemyantsey as KGB first deputy chairman, Belarusian media reported. The presidential press service said Sukharenka and Dzemyantsey were dismissed "in connection with their transfer to other jobs." Sukharenka assumed the post of KGB chief in December 2005. During the presidential election campaign in 2006 and shortly afterward, Sukharenka

became known for his heavy-handedness in dealing with opposition protests and activists, whom he publicly denounced as terrorists. Sukharenka's job was given to Yury Zhadobin, who was head of the presidential protection service until his new assignment.

July 19, 2007

BELARUS TO CONTINUE PARTICIPATION IN CFE TREATY

Syarhey Hurulyou, Belarus's first deputy defense minister and the chief of staff of the Belarusian armed forces, says Belarus will not take any "practical steps" following Russia's recent withdrawal from the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, Belapan and Interfax reported. Hurulyou was speaking at a meeting with Ukrainian Armed forces Commander-in-Chief Serhiy Kyrychenko in Brest on July 18. "We are parties to the treaty, we have ratified it and we understand that the treaty is needed, although in its current version it is totally different from the 1990 treaty," Interfax quoted Hurulyou as saying. The CFE Treaty, originally signed in 1990, was amended in 1999 to reflect changes following the breakup of the Soviet Union.

July 24, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT REPLACES OIL, GAS EXECUTIVES

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on July 23 fired the heads of some major state oil and gas companies as Belarusian officials were holding talks at the Gazprom headquarters in Moscow over an unpaid gas debt of some $500 million, Belapan and Reuters reported. Uladzimir Mayorau replaced Dzmitry Kazakou as head of the Beltranshaz gas-pipeline operator. Uladzimir Zubkou took over from Mikalay Vasilevich as director of the Belarusian Oil Company, and Valery Kazakevich replaced Alyaksandr Barouski as head of the Belarusian State Petrochemical Industry Concern (Belnaftakhim). Barouski was arrested in May and subsequently charged with embezzlement, abuse of office, and disclosure of secret information. Lukashenka reportedly tasked Kazakevich with restoring "iron order" at Belnaftakhim. Under a contract signed on December 31, 2006, between the Belarusian government and Gazprom, Belarus has to pay $100 for 1,000 cubic meters of Russian gas in 2007, compared with $46.68 during the previous 2 1/2 years. Gazprom allowed Belarus to pay 55 percent of the contract price in the first six months of 2007. Minsk promised to pay off the accumulated gas debt by July 23, but failed to do so.

Aug. 3, 2007

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT WANTS TO END 'ANARCHY' ON INTERNET

President Lukashenka said in the "Sovetskaya Belorussiya" editorial office in Minsk on August 2 that the government will put an end to what he called "anarchy" on the Internet, Reuters and Belapan reported. "It is time to stop the anarchy on the Internet. We cannot allow this great technological achievement of man to be turned into an information garbage heap," Lukashenka said. "It is a massive loudspeaker, not even of the opposition, but a loudspeaker of voices hostile toward us, [of] hostile states." Lukashenka noted that such Internet sites should be ruled by laws similar to those governing pornography or defamation

Aug. 10, 2007

BELARUSIAN CAPITAL PLANS AMBITIOUS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Belarusian Minister of Construction and Architecture Alyaksandr Selyaznyou told journalists on August 9 that the Belarusian capital will launch a construction project called Minsk City in 2009 or 2010, Belapan reported. Selyaznyou revealed that Russia's Itera oil and gas company, which discussed the project with Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in July, has offered to invest some $30 billion in the construction. Minsk City will be built at the site of the current Minsk-1 Airport and Minsk Aircraft Repair Plant. The project envisages the removal of the airport and the plant and the subsequent construction of apartment buildings for up to 40,000 people together with a business center crowned by an 80-story tower. A new five-station subway line will be built to connect the planned business center to downtown Minsk.

Aug. 27, 2007

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES REFUSE TO REGISTER HUMAN-RIGHTS GROUP

Belarus' Justice Ministry has denied registration to the Vyasna (Spring) human-rights group, Belapan reported on August 24. The ministry explained in a statement published on its website that the charter of Vyasna does not meet the requirements specified in a law on nongovernmental organizations. In particular, the ministry said the charter "contains vague purposes and implies the opportunity for this nongovernmental organization to act for achieving purposes that are not stated in the charter." The ministry also pointed out that 20 of the 69 founders of Vyasna "have convictions for committing various administrative offenses, with some having five convictions." "This testifies to the fact that the authorities are not ready for dialogue and cooperation with independent civic groups, with human-rights defenders in Belarus," Ales Byalyatski, vice president of the International Federation for Human Rights, told the *Nasha Niva* website (http://www.nn.by). "It was difficult to expect some other outcome [of the registration bid] while there are political trials in the country."

...AND WARN SIX OPPOSITION PARTIES

The Justice Ministry has issued official warnings to six political parties, saying they failed to comply with a legal requirement for the number of registered chapters, Belapan reported on August 24. The ministry cited the provision of the law governing political parties that requires them to have a Minsk city chapter and regional-level chapters in at least four oblasts. The parties targeted by the warnings, which may lead to their suspension or closure, are the Belarusian Popular Front, the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada), the Belarusian Social Sports Party, the Belarusian Party of Greens, the Republican Party, and the Social Democratic Party of People's Concord. Vintsuk Vyachorka, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, told Belapan that his party has the required number of chapters, but they have no legal addresses. Vyachorka added that many chapters of political parties were closed after the authorities required them to move from residential buildings to offices. He stressed that it is extremely difficult to lease an office for a political party. According to Vyachorka, the warnings are "the authorities' way of preparing for the 2008 parliamentary election," Reuters reported.

Sept. 12, 2007
BELARUSIAN LOWER-HOUSE HEAD RESIGNS

Uladzimir Kanaplyou, the chairman of the Chamber of Representatives, has tendered his resignation, Interfax reported on September 11. Kanaplyou reportedly explained that his health no longer allows him to perform his duties. Kanaplyou was a key supporter of presidential candidate Alyaksandr Lukashenka in 1994 and his main aide in 1994-96, after Lukashenka was elected president. Kanaplyou became the chairman of Belarus's lower house in November 2004. "I don't think that Alyaksandr Lukashenka has had a closer associate than Kanaplyou," political commentator Alyaksandr Fyaduta, who was Lukashenka's aide in 1994-95, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service. "And if he has been dumped -- now, before the [2008 legislative] elections -- it has been done with a single purpose: to prevent Kanaplyou from influencing the formation of a future parliament. Because the future parliament will have only one manager -- a successor [to Lukashenka]." Fyaduta suggested that Lukashenka is preparing his son, Viktar, for the post of speaker of the Chamber of Representatives in order to subsequently make him a successor to the presidency.

Sept. 17, 2007
FOUR BELARUSIAN OFFICERS CONVICTED OF SPYING FOR POLAND

The Supreme Court on September 14 jailed four Belarusian army officers for up to 10 years, after finding them guilty of "espionage and damaging Belarus' external security and defense capability," Belarusian and international news agencies reported. The closed-door trial began on September 4. The officers allegedly gathered intelligence on military facilities operated jointly by Belarus and Russia as well as on S-300 surface-to-air missile systems in Belarus. Uladzimir Ruskin was punished with a 10-year sentence, Viktar Bahdan was given nine years, while Syarhey Karnilyuk and Pavel Pyatkevich received seven years each. All four were stripped of their military ranks

5. REPRESSIONS

July 26, 2007
MORE THAN 60 OPPOSITIONISTS REPORTEDLY ARRESTED IN BELARUS

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, leader of the opposition Movement for Freedom, told journalists on July 25 that more than 60 opposition activists have been detained throughout Belarus within the past five days, Belapan reported. The wave of arrests reportedly came as a preemptive measure ahead of a planned opposition protest in Minsk on July 27, which is to coincide with the 17th anniversary of Belarus' Declaration of State Sovereignty. In addition to four youth opposition activists jailed on July 24, Belarusian courts have also handed down jail sentences ranging from seven to 15 days to Alyaksey Shydlouski, Syarzhuk Klyuyeu, Alyaksey Bondar, Valyantsin Sakalouski, Alyaksandr Charnyshou, Kiryl Matskevich, and Uladzimir Syarheyeu. "We call for an end to political harassment by the authorities and the immediate release of [Pavel] Sevyarynets and [Alyaksey] Shein, and all other political prisoners in Belarus, including former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin," the U.S. Embassy in Belarus said in a statement on July 25. Sevyarynets and Shein were jailed on July 24 for 15 days each.

July 30, 2007
BELARUSIAN POLICE BLOCK OPPOSITION RALLY

Police prevented opposition activists from staging an unauthorized rally on Independence Square in Minsk on July 27, intended to mark the 17th anniversary of Belarus's Declaration of State Independence, Belapan reported. Police officers blocked the rally by cordoning off the square and detaining a dozen activists, including United Civic Party Chairman Anatol Lyabedzka and Belarusian Popular Front Deputy Chairman Viktar Ivashkevich. Most of the detainees were released after several hours, but two of them, Franak Vyachorka and Yaraslau Hryshchenya, are to stand trial on July 30 on as yet unspecified charges, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Meanwhile, Dzmitry Fedaruk, a leader of the unregistered opposition Youth Front, was sentenced on July 27 to 10 days in jail. Police officers detained Fedaruk earlier the same day and accused him of using obscene language in public, a charge frequently used by the authorities to jail opposition activists.

Aug. 23, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION ACTIVIST JAILED FOR 15 DAYS FOR PUBLIC READING

A district court in Brest on August 22 sentenced opposition youth leader Pavel Sevyarynets to 15 days in jail, finding him guilty of "repeatedly violating the law on meetings and mass gatherings," RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Sevyarynets was detained on August 19 along with some 30 youth activists during a presentation of his three books. One of the books was written while Sevyarynets was serving a two-year sentence for organizing protests after Belarus's 2004 constitutional referendum. The reading in Brest was organized by the regional branch of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front.

Aug. 23, 2007
BELARUSIAN POLICE DETAIN ACTORS, AUDIENCE AT THEATER PERFORMANCE

Police officers on August 22 raided a private house in Minsk hosting a performance of an unregistered theater company called Free Theater, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Some 50 spectators and actors, including several foreigners, were detained during the raid. Belapan reported on August 23 that the police released "almost all" of the detainees several hours after the raid without bringing any charges against them. It was unclear how many remained in jail. On the night of the raid, Free Theater director Mikalay Khalezin told RFE/RL in a phone call that the detainees were kept in an "unbelievably hot" hall with nothing to drink, and were prevented from using the bathroom. "The police have not yet made any accusations against us," Khalezin said. "But what can they say? Is a performance in a private house really a crime?"

Sept. 5, 2007
BELARUSIAN COURTS PUNISH UNREGISTERED YOUTH ACTIVISTS...

A court in the city of Salihorsk on September 4 issued an official warning to 16-year-old Ivan Shyla for acting on behalf of the unregistered opposition organization Youth Front (Malady Front), RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. The judge reportedly took into consideration that Shyla is unemployed and a minor, and therefore did not fine or jail him. The prosecutor in the Shyla trial argued that the case is not politically motivated. "We would even prosecute a member of an unregistered organization of hamster lovers," the *Nasha Niva* weekly website (http:/

/www.nn.by) quoted the prosecutor as saying at the hearing. The same day, an 18-year-old girl, Nasta Azarka, who was tried in the city of Nyasvizh on the same charge as Shyla, was fined 1.2 million rubles ($580). In October 2006, Youth Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich was sentenced to 18 months in a correctional institution on charges of heading an unregistered organization. Five other Youth Front activists were fined or warned for acting on behalf of an unregistered organization in May 2007. The Youth Front has repeatedly tried to register with the Justice Ministry, but without success.

..AS POLICE ARRESTS MORE ACTIVISTS AT PROTEST

Police detained 11 youth activists in front of a courthouse in Salihorsk on September 4 during the trial of their associate Ivan Shyla, Belapan reported. "Many were hit in the back, in the kidneys. I had all my clothes torn. As we learned, this was done by Minsk policemen who had been brought to Salihorsk for the occasion," Franak Vyachorka, one of the detainees, told Belapan. Juvenile demonstrators were subsequently released, while those aged 18 and older were charged with violating regulations regarding mass events. The detainees are reportedly due to stand trial in the coming days.



Nasta Azarka on trial

Sept. 5, 2007
BELARUSIAN JOURNALISTS WARNED AGAINST WORKING FOR FOREIGN RADIO STATIONS

Prosecutors in Hrodna on September 4 issued official warnings to two journalists, Yan Raman and Natalia Makushyna, in connection with their work for foreign radio stations without accreditation, Belapan reported. Raman is a reporter for Germany's Deutsche Welle, while Makushyna reports for Radio Racja, which broadcasts into Belarus from Bialystok in Poland. Raman and Makushyna were also warned against writing "biased" articles that could damage the country's image in the international arena.

Sept. 6, 2007
BELARUSIAN COURT PUNISHES YOUTH ACTIVISTS FOR UNAUTHORIZED RALLY

A court in Salihorsk on September 5 handed down jail sentences and fines to seven opposition youth activists who demonstrated in front of the city's courthouse the previous day during a trial of their associate, Ivan Shyla, Belapan reported. Ales Kalita and Lyudmila Atakulava were jailed for seven days each, while Viktar Dzenisevich, Kasya Halitskaya, Dzmitry Fedaruk, Dzmitry Karnou, and Franak Vyachorka received fines between $60 and $70. Shyla was in court on charges of acting on behalf of an unregistered organization. As a minor, he faced a maximum sentence of six months in jail, but was released with a warning.

Sept. 10, 2007
BELARUSIAN POLICE ARREST OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS NEAR SITE OF HISTORIC BATTLE

Police detained several dozen young opposition activists in eastern Belarus on September 8 and 9 to foil their attempt to mark the anniversary of a major historic battle, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The planned festivities, with the participation of Belarusian singers and poets, were expected to begin on September 8 on the bank of the River Dnyapro near Orsha, where a 30,000-strong army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, led by Hetman Kanstantsin Astrozhski, defeated an 80,000-strong Russian army on September 8, 1514. Since 1994, the Belarusian Popular Front and other opposition groups observe the Battle of Orsha anniversary as Belarusian Military Glory Day. An RFE/RL correspondent reported that some 200 people managed to avoid road blockades and detentions and gathered on September 9 at a village near the battle site.

Sept. 10, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION ACTIVIST JAILED FOR TWO YEARS FOR INTERNET ARTICLE

Opposition activist Andrey Klimau on August 1 was sentenced to two years in prison for insulting the president and calling for revolution in an article posted on a website earlier this year, AP and Belapan reported on September 7. "The authorities closed the trial and the verdict became known only after a month," Klimau's wife, Tatsyana Leanovich-Klimava, told journalists. She said she learned of the sentence, Klimau's third in the past 10 years, in connection with an effort to visit her husband, who has been jailed since his arrest in April. She also said he suffered a heart attack while in custody. Klimau, who was a legislator in the Supreme Soviet of Belarus in 1995-96, put his signature under an impeachment motion against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, following the 1996 constitutional referendum. Klimau was arrested in February 1998 and sentenced in a trial widely believed to be politically motivated to six years in prison on charges of embezzlement and forgery. He served four years in prison and was released in March 2002. In June 2005, Klimau was sentenced to 18 months of "restricted freedom" over his role in organizing an opposition demonstration in Minsk. He was released in December 2006.

Sept. 11, 2007
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION ACTIVIST JAILED FOR 17 DAYS

A district court in Baranavichy on September 10 sentenced opposition youth leader Pavel Sevyarynets to 17 days in jail and a fine of 620,000 rubles ($290), Belapan reported. Sevyarynets was convicted on charges of resisting arrest, organizing an unsanctioned demonstration, and disorderly conduct. Sevyarynets and 23 other young people were arrested earlier the same day when they arrived at the court to show support for Yaraslau Hryshchenya, a member of the unregistered Youth Front, who was standing trial on a charge of acting on behalf of an unregistered organization. Hryshchenya on September 11 was fined 930,000 rubles ($430).

Belarusians Abroad

CZECH REPUBLIC

A Month of Authors' Reading

was the name of the 8th annual literature festival, held during the month of July 2007 in the city of Brno. It is the largest festival of its kind in the Czech Republic. This year's foreign honor guests were Belarusian writers.

On the stage of the famous theater "Husa na provazku" (A goose on a string) two literary meetings were held every day: one with a Belarusian guest, and another with a Czech writer. Thus during one month altogether 60 writers , including 30 Belarusians, presented their works to the public .This was probably the first such large presentation of contemporary Belarusian literature in the world.

Belarusian participants included the well-known giants of Belarus' literature, such as Uladzimir Arlou, Ales Razanau and Uladzimir Niaklajeu, outstanding authors of the middle generation: Leanid Dranko Majsiuk, Piatro Vasiuchenka, Ihar Babkou, Barys Piatrovic, as well as stars and starlets from the younger generation: Andrey Khadanovich, Alherd Bakharevich, Andrey Kureychyk, Illa Sin, Volha Hapeeva, Vera and Viktar Zhybul ...

In addition to writers from Belarus itself, Belarusian authors from the Bielastok region (in today's Poland) read their works: Nadzeya Artymovich, Mira Luksha, Mikhal Andrasiuk, the Polish-language writer Jerzy Plutowicz. Prague's Belarusians were represented by Max Shchur, Alexander Lukashuk, Jan Maksymiuk and Siarhey Ablameyka.

The festival's program was musically enriched by singers Lavon Volski and Viktar Shalkevich.



The Czech writers included outstanding contemporary figures, such as Jachym Topol, Michal Viewegh, Pavel Kohout, Martin Reiner, Bohdan Trojak, and others.

The contents of all readings were available on the Web site **www.autorskecteni.cz**, as well as detailed information about the literary festival.

Charles University Will Teach Belarusian

The Institute of Slavic and East European Studies of the Charles University in Prague will introduce a course of Belarusian language, at the beginning of the coming academic year 2007/2008.

The students of the Slavic Institute themselves asked their professors for this course. "The Belarusian language undoubtedly belongs to the European cultural heritage. As a legacy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Litva) it is an honorable member of the family of Slavic languages, due to its ancient histoty and purity. Unfortunately, today it also belongs to languages under serious threat," wrote the students in their request.

"Therefore we, the undersigned students, request the directors of the Institute to undertake all that is necessary to introduce instruction of the Belarusian language ," appealed the students in February of 2007. Now their efforts bore fruit.

Dr. Marek Prihoda, the director of the Seminar of East European studies, replied: "Beginning with the academic year 2007/2008, the Institute will implement a two-semester course of Belarusian for beginners , directed by Dr. Yuras Bushlakou."

Source: Web site http://svobodne-belorusko.wz.cz/

Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Editor's Note: Charles University (*Univerzita Karlova*) is the oldest university of Central and Eastern Europe. It was established in 1348, consisting then of 4 departments: arts, medicine, law and theology. Now it consists of 17 departments and institutes and is attended by 42,000 students.

On July 29 the poet and bard Andrey Khadanovich was a guest of Prague's Belarusian community. A lively literary evening took place in Prague's Belarusian club house, featuring poetry and songs by the young poet.



UNITED STATES of AMERICA

Slavic Cultural Festival

The following material formed a part of an informational handout at the Slavic Cultural Festival held on September 29, 2007 in McLean, a suburb of Washington, D.C. The Festival featured a sampling of Eastern Slavic cultures of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. The table below illustrated, in a simplified way, the distinctions between these three languages.

Slavic languages - Similarities and Differences

Although there is an interrelationship among all Slavic languages, geographically neighboring languages are usually more similar to one another. In their written form, some of these languages use the Latin alphabet, while others use the Cyrillic alphabet.

Slavic languages that use the Latin alphabet include: **Bosnian, Croatian, Czech, Polish, Slovak, Slovenian**

Slavic languages that use the Cyrillic alphabet include: **Belarusian*, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Russian, Serbian, Ukrainian**

* Belarusian used both the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabet (to a lesser degree), until the latter was banned by the Soviets.

Examples of common words in Eastern Slavic languages (in English transliteration)

		Belarusian	Russian	Ukrainian
Greetings	Welcome	Vitayem	Dobro pozhalovat'	Vitayemo
	Thank you	Dzyakuyu	Spasibo	Dyakuyu
	Please	Kali laska	Pozhaluysta	Proshu
Calendar	January	studzyen'	yanvar'	sichen'
	Sunday	nyadzyelya	voskreseniye	nedilya
	Easter	Vyalikdzyen'	Paskha	Velykden'
Food	potato	bul'ba	kartoshka	barabolya
	breakfast	s'nyedan'nye	zavtrak	snidanok
	supper	vyachera	uzhin	vecherya
Clothing	hat	kapyalyush	shlyapa	kapelyukh
	shirt	kashulya	rubashka	sorochka
	pants	portki	shtany	shtany
Body	eye	voka	glaz	oko
	face	tvar	litso	oblychchya
	skin	skura	kozha	shkira
House	ceiling	stol'	potolok	stelya
	floor	padloha	pol	pidloha
	bed	lozhak	kravat'	lizhko
Other	question	pytan'ne	vopros	pytannya
	answer	adkaz	otvyet	vidpovid'
	comma	koska	zapyataya	koma
	period	kropka	tochka	krapka
	cloud	khmara	tucha	khmara
	wave	khvalya	volna	khvylya
	moon	myesyats	luna	misyats'
	yes	tak, ale'	da	tak
	no	nye	nyet	ni

Crocodile Tears

During the last meeting of Aliaksandr Lukashenka with rectors of the universities, the president said, that the situation, when in some secondary schools there is only one lesson of Belarusian language and six lessons of English a week, is not normal. "One should know English, but one should also know his native language", he added.

He forgot to say, that "one lesson of Belarusian a week" is a result of a very clear policy, which has been implemented during these 12 years. One after another, all rights of the Belarusian language were abolished. The best Belarusian-speaking musicians are prohibited to have concerts. The names of the best Belarusian-writing authors are prohibited to be mentioned on television.

One "senator" of the upper chamber of the Parliament, a close friend of the president, has recently called "bastards" the schoolchildren who dared to protest against imposing teaching the history of Belarus in the Russian language. What do you think? He is still a close friend! Having prohibited the Belarusians to have their TV and radio stations in the Belarusian language, the state ideologists are swinging a noose, chasing the last Belarusian-language newspapers and magazines. During the "Lukashenka period" (1994-2006) more Belarusian-language mass media have been shut down, than during the times of the tsarist and Polish "readjustment" rule together...

In the face of all these problems, one feels almost ashamed to mention such a "petty detail" as abandoning synchronizing the children cartoon films in the Belarusian language since 1997. The cartoons are being synchronizing only by the volunteers from the "damned opposition".

And after the president is looking for somebody to blame who prevents children from knowing, speaking, and reading Belarusian?

Belarusian will become the equal language among the equal only then, when the president, ministers and the mass media begin to speak it. If, like now, the state organizations refuse to hire Belarusian-speaking workers, and the cultural apartheid continues, such statements can only arouse indignation.

Barys Tumar
Source: NN. Blogs, March 27, 2007

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

Our Cities Are Turning Ugly (Excerpts from an article in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 8, 2007)

Architectural Destruction of Horadnia continues

Horadnia is a beautiful city, - this cannot be said about most Belarusian cities. Most of them managed, with difficulty, to survive the wars, Nazi occupation and socialism. Horadnia, located on the country's western edge (in a triangle where Belarus, Poland and Lithuania meet), preserved many of its historical buildings, temples and palaces dating from the times of Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Russian empire. For a long time it served as a residence of Polish kings. In fact, the Saxon king August III ordered construction of a palace, patterned on the Zwinger palace in Dresden . The historical heritage of the almost 900 years old city is considered unique, and especially treasured. Its many preserved sites allow us to judge the country's general history and provide a key for understanding the complex issue of Belarusian self-identification. No wonder that the Horadnia region became a bulwark of the national-conservative opposition.

Horadnia is on the verge of becoming an infamous example of a poorly executed renovation - actually a voluntary destruction of architectural monuments. Since the moment the historical center of the city on the Nioman river was "turned upside down" in 2005 by an officially approved architectural project, public resistance has been growing. Critics, bloggers and activists have spoken up against the "destruction of Horadnia."



About 70 buildings from the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries face demolition for the sake of widening streets, clearing space for new profitable buildings, and attracting new investors. According to latest news 20 to 40 buildings have already been demolished.

In fact, a wing of the Palace of the Horadnia Royal Administrator, built in the 18th century, was destroyed in the beginning of August 2007. "The authorities are doing this mostly secretly," says one activist. "They use bulldozers without any previous warning . When we learn about it,

we station a post near the monument and attempt to stop the excavators. However, we manage to do it for only a short time. By doing it we attract the public's attention to the situation and draw attention to what's happening." Activists of the resistance have already experienced imprisonment and heavy fines. Initial encounters with authorities took place during the re-construction of a square dominated by a baroque Jesuit church. During this project foundations of the Radzivil Palace and the Ratusha (City Hall) were also damaged. Archeologists were consequently prevented from completing their regular excavations.

Polish deputies to the Europarliament and one the leader of the Belarusian opposition, Horadnia native Alaksandr Milinkevich, sent appropriate letters to UNESCO. Unfortunately, they met with little success. The administrator of the Web site **horadnia.com** has appealed to the internet users. "Historians hope for a future not destroyed by bulldozers," he remarked.

The chief architect of the city of Horadnia is defending the authorities' actions, declaring that they bring new perspectives to the city. "Guests from abroad notice the change in the city's atmosphere. Facades and roofs have been repaired, and the city became cleaner."

The real results are truly horrible. Some grotesque buildings and facades are springing up, as well as strangely duplicated buildings having nothing in common with the historical originals. Most of the buildings are painted with yellow-pink and mint yellow colors - a mixture of an artificial landscape and Legoland.

Tragically, soon we will be able to state: "Horadnia used to be a beautiful city."

HISTORICAL DATES

November 2 - Remembrance Day (Dziady)

The day for commemorating ancestors with a special family meal, dating from pre-Christian times and later associated with Christianity's All Souls' Day. .

Since the Belarusian Declaration of Sovereignty in July, 1990, **Dziady** became an occasion for patriotic demonstrations emphasizing the victims and heroes of the historical past. Such observances were led by the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and other groups and included marches to **Kurapaty**, a site near Minsk where mass executions took place during the Stalinist era.

November 1830 through 1831

The national liberation uprising against the Russian empire and for the renewal of the *Recpaspalitaja (Republic) of Two Nations* (Poland and Litva)

November 1st through December 31, 1920
The Anti-Bolshevik Slucak Uprising

Anti-Bolshevik military action in the region of Slucak, organized by representatives of the Belarusian Democratic [National] Republic.

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